DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 470 609 JC 020 771

AUTHOR	Cassara, Shirley, Ed.; Bernard, Jean M., Ed.
TITLE	Teaching for Our Times: Access.
INSTITUTION	Bunker Hill Community Coll., Boston, MA.
REPORT NO	Vol-3
PUB DATE	2001-11-00
NOTE	120p.; For Volume 2, "Teaching for Our Times: Focus on Learning," see ED 448 824.
AVAILABLE FROM	Office of the Vice President of Academic Affairs, Bunker Hill Community College, 250 New Rutherford Ave., Boston, MA 02129-2925. Tel: 617-228-2435.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - General (020)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Access to Education; *College Role; *Community Colleges; Educationally Disadvantaged; Institutional Mission; *Minority Groups; School Community Relationship; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS	*Bunker Hill Community College MA

ABSTRACT

This volume of Bunker Hill Community College's (Massachusetts) series, "Teaching for Our Times," focuses on issues of access. The original concept for community colleges included access as an open door to learning, where anyone, even without a high school diploma, could begin a new academic life in an institution free from the barriers imposed by traditional colleges and universities. As the community college movement achieved success across the country, efforts were made to expand the notion of access through the active recruitment of new students who had been left out of the educational mainstream. Ties to community agencies as well as to minority groups labeled "disadvantaged" were developed, bringing in an even more diverse student population. The meaning of access changed from just being available to all who wanted to attend to being openly solicitous toward segments of society with complex needs. This volume examines how the community college's mission has changed along with a new understanding of access. Chapters include: (1) "Pathways to Access"; (2) "Getting Here"; (3) "Staying Here"; and (4) "Transformation Through Learning." Each chapter includes several essays on issues of distance education, access for minority populations, student retention and success, and mathematics and writing for developmental and second-language students. (CB)

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TEACHING FOR OUR TIMES

Access

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BUNKER HILL COMMUNITY COLLEGE
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Volume Three

TEACHING FOR OUR TIMES

Access

Edited by
Shirley Cassarà
Jean M. Bernard

BUNKER HILL COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Learning for the Real World

Dedicated to Valerie Elaine Hope
1951-2001
— tutor, learner, mentor, friend —

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Access

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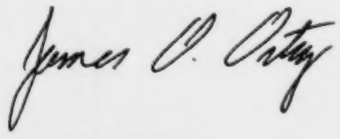
Foreword

It is with considerable pride that I write this foreword to the third volume of the Bunker Hill Community College Journal, *Teaching for Our Times: Access*. The articles are thoughtful and enlightening, demonstrating a firm commitment to student access and success. Over the last three years, we have witnessed a significant deepening in the journal's ability to examine and express our community's primary endeavor — education. Without hesitation, I recommend that you read this year's issue from cover to cover.

In his introduction, Professor R. Brent Bonah provides an excellent overview to the theme of access. I will only add one notion, and that is my conviction that access is not a barrier to educational quality. It is, in fact, the foundation upon which a quality education can be built.

Throughout my career in community colleges, I have noted that the struggle to address the issues brought up by access, including multiculturalism, diversity of social and economic backgrounds, gender, age, and different levels of academic preparation, are the very issues which have created the movement toward quality in education. This movement has become manifest in initiatives such as learning communities, classroom action research, classroom assessment, service learning, and learning outcomes. I suggest that without the need to address the issues surrounding access, lecturing would remain the predominant, if not the only, style of working with students.

At BHCC, our work within the quality movement has led us to view ourselves as a learning college in which all of us — students, faculty and staff — are learning from each other, and, in the process, are creating a quality education for all. The articles in this year's *Teaching for our Times* attest to our reality that access and quality are different faces of the same coin.



James O. Ortiz, Ed.D.
Vice President, Academic and Student Affairs

November, 2001

Introduction

R. Brent Bonah

The theme for this year's edition of *Teaching for Our Times* is "access," a word that has always been identified with the community college. From the early days of the Chicago YMCA, a forerunner of today's colleges, to the sophisticated learning environment that community colleges now offer their students, access to education has been central to the community college mission.

The original concept of community colleges included access as an open door to learning, where anyone, even without a high school diploma, could begin a new academic life in a new type of institution — free from the barriers imposed by traditional colleges and universities. These new colleges, funded by local communities, countries, or states, combined technical and traditional academic degree programs, short-term and regular studies into one institution. Access meant opportunity for people of all ages to seek new job skills or work toward associate degrees as a way to eventually transfer to four-year colleges or universities. For many, the drop-in, drop-out model of education provided skills necessary for career advancement or even a change in career. At the same time, it became clear that access, openness and opportunity required the need for support systems, because if these were not available, the open door would became a revolving door leading to poor student retention.

As the community college movement achieved success across the country, efforts were made to expand the notion of access through the active recruitment of new students who had been left out of the educational mainstream. Ties to community agencies as well as to minority groups and other populations labeled "disadvantaged" were developed, bringing in an even more diverse student population. The meaning of "access" changed from just being available to all who wanted to attend to being openly solicitous toward segments of society with complex needs. To reach new populations, courses were offered not only on campus but also in community centers and high schools in adjacent areas.

Shifting social and economic needs expanded the community college's mission. New immigrants needed training in language skills; businesses

found that there was a shortage of trained workers and often looked to the community college to provide skills training. The role of the community college widened even more. Bunker Hill Community College, founded in the era of the comprehensive community college, has continued to evolve in order to serve communities that are constantly changing -- not only demographically, but also in terms of educational goals and desired outcomes.

At Bunker Hill Community College, access is more than accepting students into degree, certificate and non-credit courses and programs. Access is a working commitment by the college administration for faculty to provide students with a variety of ways to realize their goals. This requires that we take into consideration the many dimensions of access.

Access means the testing of students when they enroll in the college to determine correct placement levels for students in English, English as a Second Language, and mathematics. Successful placement means a greater opportunity for students to succeed in their basic courses and learn the skills necessary to continue their learning adventure.

Access means providing faculty with opportunities to look at fresh ways to revitalize their courses, from establishing workshops in assessment techniques to using effective technology in the classroom. Here we have many workshops, lead by practitioners of new theories and ideas about learning. Here we have a computer in every faculty member's office and an extensive Academic Computing Center used by faculty in sundry disciplines as well an Instructional Design and Technology Center and a fledgling Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. Many sabbaticals are awarded each year with the expectation that the results will help in the revitalization of the learning environment. Mini-grants are awarded to faculty to support research and implementation of new teaching strategies related to college goals.

Access means providing support for students with special needs. The counseling center provides training for faculty working with students with disabilities, while tutoring and computer supported programs assist them with their learning.

Access means understanding and responding to the learning styles of students from different countries, cultures, and linguistic backgrounds as well as being receptive to their strengths and the rich cultural contributions that they make.

Access means creating a climate where students feel welcome to be themselves and to cultivate openness to others.

Access means providing courses to students using instructional supervision, technology, and support services which provide them with more flexible opportunities for learning. The Center for Self-Directed Learning provides staff and facilities for students who choose to take responsibility for their own learning in a setting that is less structured than the traditional college classroom. The recently created eCollege provides a powerful new vehicle for access to learning through Web-based courses and other distance learning technologies. Learning occurs through interactive dialogue between BHCC instructors and students who may be physically located anywhere in Massachusetts, across the country, or on the other side of the globe.

It is with the many meanings of access in mind that the articles of this journal are presented. The authors temporarily step outside their daily roles as faculty members, professional staff, administrators or students to explore what the concept of access means to them. It can be a new approach to teaching, a way to develop new skills for students, or the role that the college environment plays in quality learning. Take the time to enjoy and learn from the 2001 *Teaching for Our Times*. It's a good read!

The beauty is in the walking. We are betrayed by destinations.

Gwyn Thomas

PATHWAYS TO ACCESS

Cynthia Duda

Herbert I. Gross

Shirley Cassarà

Timothy M. McLaughlin

I Can Explain

Cynthia Duda

Everything seemed the same opening day — same basement room, same long block of time three mornings a week, same long, loose skirt and shirt I flounced around in whenever I taught summer session, same arctic air-conditioned currents ruffling loose papers, same sense that we were alone and no one was watching to see if my experiment wobbled off to one corner while I slumped in another, mopping egg off my brow.

But there were differences, of course, obvious if you looked in the students' wallets — they had more money in them than any of my students had ever had before. More by $45, the price of the textbook I had chosen not to use that semester; more by the cost of any book, text or otherwise, I could have chosen but didn't. And, absent a text, my students looked different. They didn't have that dazed, la-la look: "I'm here, I've just dropped a bundle for this big'un — which I am petting with my left hand — and after six weeks I will have, by osmosis, absorbed its contents, aced this course, and put my troubles behind me."

Instead, they looked at me like..."hmm. I just tore all hell outta my schedule to fit this course in, but hey, that's okay. I haven't made a *serious* mistake. We don't need a book. We don't know you, but if you say it's so, it must be. You're like...*the teacher*, right?"

Absolutely. I had been teaching on the college level for eight years. I was also the oldest person in the room and the only one with a Southern accent. None would have called me a peer, but then, how could any of my students have known how much I am like them.

Writing is the hardest thing I do, and I will do almost anything not to do it — dust and vacuum, brush and floss, walk doggies, iron. I also know what educational struggle is all about. It's fair to say I am qualified — with the requisite degrees, having passed geometry in high school and calculus in

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college — to teach in a community college because I was a "nice girl who tried hard." But to this day, I still feel queasy whenever I think about finding the volume of a cone. Had writing not chosen me and inflated the other side of my head, I wouldn't have had such a lopsided life. That has given me everything — connection, fascination, consolation. It was access into this rich, fraught landscape of language that I wanted for my students, and in the summer when no one seemed to be looking, I decided to see if I could find it.

Everyone knows writers learn to write by writing; three-hundred-page writing textbooks say as much, three hundred different ways in three hundred different voices. An exaggeration, but yet...if a person like me with reasonable comprehension and facility for writing finds textbooks confusing and overwhelming, how must a student new to English or with weak skills feel? Yammered at, what with all the excerpts, explications, exercises (and never mind bullets, borders, and benday boxes) up in their faces screaming for attention. Even when I pruned texts to the barest, best essentials, I was still holding prayer meetings. Not even George Orwell's "A Hanging," bobbing in its anthologized sea, was enough for students to lift themselves up on. The discussion of which — in preparation for a writing assignment — floated in silence like a bubble from the top of one bowed head to another till it burst and vanished without a trace.

Everyone also knows that writers learn to write by imitating what they read. But if they're praying instead of reading snatches of a writer as good as Orwell, what would happen if they read him at length? Was the cacophony created by the variety of voices in writing textbooks the crux of the problem? Even before I began teaching, long before as a student and a reader, I never cared much for short stories, especially those in anthologies. I preferred my fiction in novel-length doses. It took some pages to get oriented in the material and used to the writer's voice, but once there, I was happy to dig in for the duration. Reading in an anthology felt like being jerked around. By the time I had dug into one story, it was over and I had to adjust to another. Granted, when I was ten years old and read my first adult novel, *Gone With the Wind*, I didn't know from voice, but if any writer ever had one, it was Margaret Mitchell in all her inflected Southern sprawl.

But for my writing students, under the semester clock that doesn't accommodate the luxury of reading at length and *then* writing in response, novels wouldn't work. And as much as I admire Orwell, I wasn't sure if

reading a series of excerpts from his oeuvre would work either. Consistency of voice is one thing, but the timbre of the voice is quite another.

While writers do learn by writing and imitating, they may also begin writing spontaneously with only the rudiments of language at hand because they are moved to do so. I wanted my students to read a writer with the moving immediacy of Jane Kenyon or Stevie Smith. The first time I read Kenyon's "Let Evening Come," I cried; the first time I read Smith's "Not Waving but Drowning," I cried. I have had to leave readings in the middle of a poem that I wasn't reading but *hearing* because I couldn't keep my crying quiet.

I can explain. Crying isn't the test of anything; it's how I react when the gap between the halves of my head is bridged. Which is a paradox, this crying, since the feeling comes as close to grace as I'm likely to know in this life — satisfied, whole, complete. But poetry is designed to do that — unite the halves — keying as it does off the ten-syllable line, which is the standard in all languages whether they have Shakespeares or not. In an essay first published in *Natural Classicism*, Frederick Turner and Ernst Poppel assert that the ten-syllable metered poetic line is universal because the interval of time required to read or speak it contains the optimum-sized packet of meaning that can travel between the brain halves and be absorbed, processed, and understood in its entirety (par. 96). If they are correct, it's no wonder poets are often said to be getting news from another place. The feeling, certainly that which I've experienced through poetry, is — in an age now calibrated in bytes — indeed like a message from a foreign planet. But heart and truth are neither places nor planets. They are what all art aims to show us, and when it does, we know it.

I played a hunch that summer session on the first day of class when I read my students a story by Raymond Carver called "Chef's House." Reading to captives certainly puts paid to prayer meetings. But still, they could have sat mute — we were strangers to each other and diverse in all the ways of urban community colleges. Perhaps the man from Ethiopia and the woman from Albania were not yet proficient enough in English to follow the story; perhaps the 18-year-old was too young to have seen the dynamics of alcoholism that drive the characters; perhaps Carver's lean prose had cut through the bone rather than to it, and the thing lay dead on the page for all students regardless.

But in fact, we ran over — literally, which isn't easy to do in a class of three hours, because by the time I reined the discussion in, having had my own say about aspects of the story I'd never noticed until my students pointed them out, we started the in-class writing activity late. And it went downhill from there — or uphill, if you were lifted as I was that day by the thrust of students entering language.

Once in, they never turned back, reading and writing on the Carver curve from "Preservation" to "Careful" through "A Small, Good Thing" and "The Student's Wife" to the final epiphany of "Cathedral." I knew before the semester ended that I would teach this way fall semester, and three of those English 095 students came with me for more Carver in English 111. I have since followed the same singular voice program using other writers — Susan Minot, Haruki Murakami — with similar results. Most students like it, most pass the departmental exit exam, but every semester there are a few who don't like it or me. I know of no one who has complained about the money saved buying a fiction paperback in lieu of a textbook.

English composition, after all, is not a literature course and certainly not a literature survey course in which a $60 anthology of the English romantic poets might be money well spent. Because community colleges do not offer four-year degrees, the urge to expose students to a range of writers and genres before they fly away without any Aeschylus or Eliot risks the Melville effect. I will be happy to sign an affidavit that *Moby Dick* is the greatest American novel ever written, but please, do not *ever* ask me to read it again. Once, as a high school junior with standard adolescent interests and attention span, was too much, especially when served up in the same semester with *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The House of Seven Gables*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Moreover, English composition is a "how-to" course — how to use language, which is a skill and thus akin to...driving. Students learning how to drive are always taken out in the same type of car until they have mastered the fundamentals. I don't know of a single driver's education program that moves learners from automatic sedans to standard shift pick-ups and on to limousines, buses, and armoured tanks in preparation for passing the state road test.

Carver, Minot, and Murakami (in translation from the Japanese) all work as vehicles where a semester of Melville or Henry James wouldn't, since their

voices offer the same access into language that poetry does. Not because they dazzle with metaphor or prettify with poesy, but because they write by stripping their prose of all distraction and indulgence, compressing it until what's left acts on the reader like those ten-syllable poetic packets of meaning. My students don't cry as I do when they pass into the grace of language; they speak in class and respond in writing *because they have been moved to do so.* Skills, proficiency, background, age, race, gender, nationality matter not a whit. Heart and truth move all comers.

Carver, Minot, and Murakami have also published enough in units short enough so that in fifteen weeks I can meet departmental objectives and send my students to the exit exam with the preparation to pass it. By that, I mean I read over fifty of Carver's stories before I found twelve from which I could spin assignments. Minot made the search easier — her novel, *Monkeys*, is actually a collection of nine linked stories, six of which suit my purpose. More than one student has admitted to reading all of them, but the woman who told me that *Monkeys* was the only book she had ever read cover-to-cover, never imagining she'd "live long enough to do *that*," set a new standard for satisfaction in teaching.

And there has been satisfaction in learning as well, though what I've learned isn't something new. Yes, I am indeed so like my students, particularly those who don't catch it the first time. Only worse. As a writer, for me, it's every time. Every time I teach from the work of only one writer, turning off the racket of all those other voices, I learn again the catalytic, transforming power of listening in the quiet of a single writer's voice. Once inside, where distraction and doubt have no moment, I begin again to hear my own.

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Mathematics as a Second Language: An Innovative Way to Better Understand The World of Numbers

Herbert I. Gross

In an era when education seems to be overly concerned with the use of manipulatives and high tech visual aids, there is a tendency to forget that innovative use of language may in itself be both the greatest manipulative and the best visual aid. Abstract words, which have meaning only to people who know the language, can generate tears, laughter, anger and just about any other form of human emotion. This article will demonstrate that by properly choosing the nouns that numbers modify, instructors can make many mathematical concepts easier for students to comprehend, no matter what other modes of instruction are being used.

The late Max Lerner, when once asked to summarize the greatness of America in just one word, chose the word, *access*. He stressed the fact that in America, we were not necessarily guaranteed success in life, but we were assured avenues of access regardless of race, color, creed or religious beliefs. When the comprehensive community college system provided access to all deserving students, the concept was broadened to include those who may have been denied access to higher education because of location, age, national origin, or income. By the early nineteen seventies, the mission of access had been accomplished. Geographically, in excess of eighty percent of our country's population lived within twenty-five miles of some community college, and academically, anyone who had earned a high school diploma or GED was welcome to matriculate.[1]

In the above context, the terms *access* and *equal opportunity* were virtually synonymous. That is, most of the community colleges at that time were more like junior colleges than they are now. Because there were ample good jobs for high school graduates, students did not need to attend college in

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order to find jobs that would provide a living wage. Thus, in the early years, most community college students were interested in eventually transferring to four-year colleges and universities.

When Bunker Hill Community College first opened its doors, it was still true that good jobs with promise for upward mobility existed for anyone who had the perseverance to graduate from high school. Today, however, thanks largely to the same technology that has upgraded our society's productivity, these jobs no longer exist. The bottom line is that an associate degree, or at least some certification of post-secondary academic achievement, has replaced the high school diploma as the entry-level credential for jobs that promise a decent future. Against this background, we are seeing students that we never used to see before — namely, the students who would have gotten decent jobs upon completion of high school and hence never felt the need to get a post-secondary education. Many of these students are less prepared for college, and, consequently, it takes more effort on our part to ensure that they acquire the basic skills that are a prerequisite for academic success.

The bottom line is that this new challenge redefines the meaning of access. It is no longer enough to make sure that students can easily gain entrance to a community college. Unlike the dry cleaning store, the motto of which is "in by ten, out by five," it is not a meaningful form of access if we admit students in September and have them leave in January, after one semester, without having accomplished their mission. In many ways, the inclusion statement of any urban comprehensive community college should now be amended to guarantee access "regardless of race, color, creed, religion, income *or previous academic success.*" For us to fulfill this mission, we have to find additional ways to make our subjects more relevant to the self-perceived needs and backgrounds of all of our students.

Introducing Math as a Second Language: Have You Ever Seen a Number?

Strange as it may seem, none of us has ever seen a number. Restated, let's just say that we see numbers as adjectives rather than as nouns. That is, we have seen three apples, three dollars, three people, even three tally marks; but never "threeness" by itself. Thus, any mathematics course I teach begins with the underlying principle: *numbers are adjectives that modify nouns (or other adjectives).*

As an application of how we can use the "numbers as adjectives" principle, consider the following situation. Many students often fail to grasp the relative size of a billion with respect to a million in the sense that they view both numbers as being "very big." However, suppose we now let the adjectives "million" and "billion" both modify the noun, "seconds." Some very elementary calculations show us that a million seconds is a "little less" than twelve days, while a billion seconds is a "little more" than thirty-one years. This gives new life to the idea that although a million is quite "big," it is still a small fractional part of a billion. It also gives students (and others as well) an easy-to-understand ratio; namely, a million is to a billion as twelve days is to thirty-one years. While it may be easy to confuse a million with a billion, no one ever confuses twelve days with thirty-one years![2]

Applying Mathematics as a Second Language — or, Consider the Nouns

As an attention-getter in my Fundementals of Mathematics (basic arithmetic) course, I write the seemingly false statement 3 + 2 = 40 on the board. After the initial disbelief has abated, we observe that if "3" is modifying dimes, "2" is modifying nickels and "40" is modifying cents, we get the true statement that 3 dimes + 2 nickels = 40 cents. This leads to an important fundamental principle, namely:

> 3 + 2 = 5 only when 3, 2, and 5 are adjectives that modify the same noun. More generally, the traditional addition tables assume that the numbers being added modify the same noun.

This simple principle gives us many pieces of information. As trivial as it may sound, we now know that:

3 apples + 2 apples = 5 apples
3 cookies + 2 cookies = 5 cookies
3 gloogs + 2 gloogs = 5 gloogs

Let's now apply this to the problem of adding large numbers. Suppose that you are in the first grade and are confronted with a problem such as 3,000,000,000 + 2,000,000,000. Chances are, you would find that because each number has ten digits, this problem is overwhelming. However, suppose we recognize that in place value notation the noun billion is represented by nine zeroes. That is, if we want to translate 3,000,000,000 into plain English, we would simply write, "three billion." The point is that 3 billion + 2 billion = 5 billion because "3," "2," and "5" are adjectives modifying the same noun.

A Nonmathematical Generalization

Suppose there is a black cat in the room and you pose this question to another person (who is also in the room): "True or false? The cat is black." Assuming that the person answers "true," you ask the same person: "True or false? *El gato es negro*." It turns out that the person doesn't understand Spanish, so this time he answers, "I don't know." Now, if a person were color blind, that would also explain why the answer would be, "I don't know." However, being color blind does not depend on language. Thus, if a person says "true" to the first question but "I don't know" to the second question, it is clear that he or she has a language problem, not a vision problem. We can therefore surmise that the person who knows that 3 billion + 2 billion = 5 billion, but doesn't know that 3,000,000,000 + 2,000,000,000 = 5,000,000,000, has a language problem, not a math problem.

In essence, place value takes the place of such nouns as *tens, hundreds, thousands, ten thousands*, and so on. Consequently by using our fundamental principle and the language of place value, we can solve any addition problem simply by using the addition tables (or, in more primitive terms, by counting on our fingers).

Childhood Revisited

Recall how, as a child, you tended to use your fingers to do addition problems. For example, to solve the problem 69 + 2, you might start with 69 and then, holding up two fingers (or hiding them behind your back if the teacher was watching) you'd say, "70, 71..." If the teacher "caught" you doing the problem that way, s(he) might admonish you by saying, "Grownups don't count on their fingers!" Perhaps what the teacher should have done in such a case would have been to give the students problems that require the use of more fingers than they have. For example, consider a multi-digit problem such as 532 + 146. You can still start with 532, but you cannot hold up 146 fingers. However, in place value notation, numbers in the same column modify the same noun. That is, we may view the problem in the form:

Hundreds	Tens	Ones
5	3	2
+1	4	6
6	7	8

This reduces the sum of two 3-digit numbers to three simpler sums, each of which involves only two single digit numbers.

Prelude to Fractions

The "adjective/noun" theme gives us a seamless way to make the transition from whole numbers to fractions. To see how, let's analyze how we determined that...

3 dimes + 2 nickels = 40 cents

We solved this problem by converting nickels and dimes to a common denomination (most likely cents), after which we added the resulting adjectives. That is, we reasoned that since an amount depends on both the noun and the adjective, it is not a bad idea to separate them. For example, we might introduce fraction notation very early in the primary school curriculum, writing the adjective on top and the noun on the bottom. Thus, we might introduce the idea of a fraction simply by rewriting 3 dimes + 2 nickels = 40 cents in the form

$$\frac{3}{\text{dimes}} + \frac{2}{\text{nickels}} = \frac{40}{\text{cents}}$$

Since the top number is the adjective, we invent the name "numerator." Notice that the word "numerator" suggests the verb enumerate, meaning "to count," which addresses the concept of "how many," which is an adjective. The bottom number represents the denomination, which suggests its being a noun. Hence we invent the word "denominator."

Whenever possible, we should use the simplest word that conveys the meaning of what we want to say. In this context, I feel that it is necessary to explain "numerator" and "denominator" in terms of adjectives and nouns. In my mind, unless such an explanation is given, it makes no sense to use such unfamiliar words such as "numerator" and "denominator" in place of the much more simple to understand words such as "top" and "bottom." In fact, using such words as "numerator" and "denominator" without proper motivation may be the initial cause for students' developing a fear, or at least a dislike, of fractions.

In any case, to solve the problem:

$$\frac{3}{\text{dimes}} + \frac{2}{\text{nickels}} = \frac{40}{\text{cents}}$$

we would first need to find a common denomination. In this case, the common denomination could be cents, nickels or dimes. In other words, we

can solve the problem in any of the following equivalent ways:

$$\frac{30}{\text{cents}} + \frac{10}{\text{cents}} = \frac{40}{\text{cents}}$$

$$\frac{6}{\text{nickles}} + \frac{2}{\text{nickels}} = \frac{8}{\text{nickles}}$$

$$\frac{3}{\text{dimes}} + \frac{1}{\text{dime}} = \frac{4}{\text{dimes}}$$

While 40 cents, 8 nickels and 4 dimes do not look the same, they are three different but equivalent ways of expressing the same amount of money. It is similar to the fact that Mark Twain and Samuel Clemens are two different names that name the same person. The point is that such an approach is an excellent segue for making fractions a natural extension of whole numbers. From cents, nickels and dimes (which are fractional parts of a dollar), we can gradually replace the nouns by the more traditional treatment of fractional parts.

Fractions Revisited

Notice how much simpler the English language would be if to form the opposite of each adjective, we only had to affix the prefix, "un-." For example, think of such pairs of opposites (or more formally, antonyms) as fair and unfair, equal and unequal, happy and unhappy, familiar and unfamiliar. Think of how easy it would be to know that as soon as you knew that John was taller than Bill you also knew that Bill was "untaller" than John. Unfortunately, the opposite of taller is shorter, and you don't automatically learn the word shorter by knowing the word taller.

Therefore, if you understand the meaning of the sentence, "John is taller than Bill," but you don't understand the meaning of the sentence, "Bill is shorter than John," you have a language problem, not a height perception problem.

This same idea gives us a way of paraphrasing any statement involving fractions into an equivalent statement that uses only whole numbers. For example, we never have to say that a day is one-seventh of a week. Rather we can say, instead, that 7 days is 1 week. Note that we can use the notation 7 and $\frac{1}{7}$ even when we are not discussing days and weeks. For example, it is relatively easy to show students that the adjective "7" placed before a noun means to multiply the noun by 7. As a real life application, suppose we are buying equally priced pens. Then the cost of seven pens is seven times the

cost of one pen. That is, in terms of cost, seven pens means (the cost of) 1 pen x 7.

In this context, it is just as easy for students to learn that the adjective "$\frac{1}{7}$" before a noun means to divide that noun by 7. Again, using our example of buying equally priced pens, suppose that a box contains seven pens and that the price of the entire box is $21. Then the price of each pen can be described as being one-seventh of $21; or in more-familiar terms, $21 ÷ 7.

In summary, the relationship between $\frac{1}{7}$ and 7 is the same as the relationship between multiplication and division (as well as between *taller* and *shorter*).

Translating Fraction Problems into Whole Number Problems

Once the new notation is understood, students should be able to convert fractional amounts into equivalent whole number amounts. For example, given the fraction $\frac{2}{5}$, we can think of any "numerical noun" that is divisible by 3. We might think of 12 (a dozen), 60 (minutes in an hour) or 360 (degrees in a circle). We can then divide the "numerical noun" by 3 and multiply the quotient by 2. In this context,

$\frac{2}{5}$ of a dozen (doughnuts) = $\frac{2}{5}$ of 12 doughnuts = 8 doughnuts;

$\frac{2}{5}$ of an hour = $\frac{2}{5}$ of 60 minutes = 40 minutes

$\frac{2}{5}$ of a circle = $\frac{2}{5}$ of 360 degrees = 240 degrees.

Suppose a student were now asked, "Which is greater, $\frac{2}{5}$ or $\frac{3}{8}$?" Since 360 is divisible by both 5 and 8, they could pick 360° as their noun, from whence it is easy to see that:

$\frac{2}{5}$ of 360° = (360° ÷ 5) x 2 = 72° x 2 = 144°, and...

$\frac{3}{8}$ of 360° = (360° ÷ 8) x 3 = 45° x 3 = 135°

Since 144° is greater than 135°, it means that $\frac{2}{5}$ of a circle is greater than $\frac{3}{8}$ of a circle (in fact, it's 9° greater). The important point, at least in terms of the concept of a foreign language, is that we have translated a *foreign language* problem (fractions) into an equivalent *native language* problem (whole numbers). This gives students an excellent and practical demonstration of critical thinking in the sense that we reduced a new situation to an equivalent but more familiar context.

Using Nouns To Avoid Fractions: Some Historical Anecdotes

Students often find it helpful to know that centuries ago, people were already using nouns in "clever" ways to avoid fractions. For example, the suffix "teen" means "plus ten". Yet the first "teen" comes after twelve, not ten. Ten did not become important until the invention of place value (where ten was used as the base because we happened to have ten fingers, not twelve). The point is that if you want to avoid fractions, 12 is a much better choice than 10 because aside from 1 and itself, 10 is divisible only by 2 and 5 while 12 is divisible by 2, 3, 4 and 6. That's why a dozen is 12, not 10.

The ancient Babylonians liked using 60 (such as 60 minutes in an hour; 60 seconds in a minute) because 60 was the smallest natural number that was divisible by both 10 and 12 (That way, they had the best of both worlds!). In this way, many fractional parts of an hour are a whole number of minutes.

In a similar vein, the ancient Greeks chose 360 as the number of degrees in a circle; the fact that 360 is divisible by 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, 18, 20, 24, 30, 36, 40, 45, 60, 72, 90, 120 and 180 makes many fractional parts of a circle a whole number of degrees. The concept was so appealing that in the early Latin calendar, a year had 10 months, each with 36 days, because 360 was a "nice" number to use if you did not like to use fractions. However, it eventually became apparent that the earth, not knowing that it was supposed to take 360 days to revolve around the sun, took 365! Therefore, Julius Caesar extended the year by adding two months, Quintilis and Sextilis (later renamed Julius and Augustus), and varied the number of days in each month to bring the calendar in line with the natural cycle. Today, even there are no calendars in operation that consider 360 days a year, it remains true that there are 360 degrees in a circle.

In the English system of measurement, there are 5,280 feet in a mile. The reason, again, is that in this way many fractional parts of a mile can be expressed as a whole number of feet. In particular, the divisors of 5,280 are 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 20, 22, 24, 30, 32, 33, 40, 44, 48, 55, 60, 66, 80, 88, 96, 110, 120,132, 160, 165, 176, 220, 240, 264, 330, 352, 440, 480, 528, 880, 1056, 1320, 1760, 2640. Thus, by choosing 5,280 to be the number of feet in a mile, many more fractional parts of a mile were able to be expressed as a whole number of feet than what would have happened had we elected to choose an easier-to-remember number such as 5,000.

A New Way to Visualize Adding Fractions

For the most part, we can assume that to many community college students who test into the basic level, fractions might just as well be a foreign language. Therefore, if we can assume that whole numbers are their native tongue, we can teach students to work with fractions by treating them the same as we do in teaching any foreign language. That is, students can be taught to convert any problem involving fractions into an equivalent problem that involves only whole numbers. They can then solve the resulting problem and translate the result into the language of fractions.

Suppose, for example, that English is your native tongue and that you have enrolled in a course called "Conversational Sanskrit." To get you immersed in the language, the instructor asks you questions in Sanskrit and you are required to reply in Sanskrit. Assuming that you have not yet become bilingual, the chances are that you are more comfortable thinking in English than you are in Sanskrit. Thus, you might employ the following sequence of steps, a sequence that applies to learning any foreign language:

Step 1: You listen to the question in the foreign language.

Step 2: Because you are more comfortable thinking in terms of your native tongue, you silently translate the question into your native tongue (After all, you don't want the teacher to notice that you are "cheating.")

Step 3: You then, again silently, formulate the answer to the question in your native tongue.

Step 4: Finally, you translate the answer from your native tongue into the foreign language and say the translation aloud to your teacher.

Illustrative Example:

Express the sum $\frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{4}$ as a common fraction.

Analysis: To add two numbers as adjectives they must modify the same noun. We also know that $\frac{1}{3}$ tells us to divide the noun it modifies by 3 and $\frac{1}{4}$ tells us to divide the noun it modifies by 4. Hence, we need a noun that is divisible by both 3 and 4. One such number is 12; and since there are 12 in a dozen, let's assume that $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{1}{4}$ both modify "a dozen doughnuts."

Solution:

Step 1: We read the problem as $\frac{1}{3}$ of a dozen + $\frac{1}{4}$ of a dozen.

Step 2: To translate the problem into a whole number problem, we replace a dozen doughnuts by 12 doughnuts. Since $\frac{1}{3}$ of 12 = 12 ÷ 3 = 4 and since $\frac{1}{4}$ of 12 = 3, we see that the problem may be translated into the equivalent problem: 4 doughnuts + 3 doughnuts.

Step 3: Since our "natural tongue" is whole numbers, we know that 4 doughnuts + 3 doughnuts = 7 doughnuts.

Step 4: "7 doughnuts" is the correct answer but the wrong language. That is, since the problem is stated in terms of "dozens," we also want the answer to be. So while 7 doughnuts is a whole number of doughnuts, it constitutes a fractional part of a dozen; namely it is 7 of the 12 that are needed to form a dozen. The fraction $\frac{7}{12}$ indicates that we have "7 of the 12." Hence, in the language of fractions, our answer in Step 3 becomes: $\frac{1}{3}$ of a dozen + $\frac{1}{4}$ of a dozen = $\frac{7}{12}$ of a dozen; and leaving out the common denomination we see that $\frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{4} = \frac{7}{12}$.

Epilogue

There is a saying to the effect that when you have forgotten everything else you have ever been taught, what is left is the only thing that can truly be called education. The best way to ensure that students retain important information is to present it as much as possible in terms that are relevant to them. The more intuitive a concept is, the more comfortable we are with it and the less afraid we are to build upon it. By viewing numbers as adjectives that modify nouns with which they feel comfortable, students are better able to connect abstract mathematical concepts with things that are more familiar to them.

There is another relevant saying about teaching that says the job of a good teacher is not only to cover ground but also to uncover it. In this context, although Fundamentals of Mathematics (MAT 090) may be viewed as being "remedial" with respect to its mathematical content, when it is taught as described herein it is far from remedial in terms of giving us the opportunity to teach students more about critical thinking. The adjective/noun theme affords an excellent vehicle for students to see the connectedness of mathematics to language, logic, history and philosophy. This tends to broaden their view of what education is all about. While such an approach is

valuable in the teaching of any subject, such an approach has an even greater impact when its used in a mathematics class because of the students' previous bias that mathematics is an island unto itself.

In this way, we do not have to decide whether we teach content or values. Rather, we find that when we teach them concomitantly, each facet emerges more powerfully than if it had been taught at the exclusion of the other.

Endnotes

1 In some states, most noteworthy North Carolina, where the GED is administered by the community college system, even waive the high school diploma/GED requirement.

2 Size is relative. A small number relative to one number might be very large relative to another number. For example, while a million is small compared to a billion, it won't be a million days since the birth of Jesus until the 26th century! As a quick underestimate, if there were 400 days in a year, 2,000 years is only 800,000 days. In fact, if you live to the age of 100, on your hundredth birthday, you will have lived for less than 37,000 days.

3 It isn't necessary to know what a "gloog" is (in fact, I made the word up!). The point is that 3 of them and 2 more of them is 5 of them! This has particular application to algebra and an expression such as $3x + 2x$. Students often act as if x is just another "gloog word" and say things like "I don't know what x is". The point is that it doesn't matter, at least in the sense that 3 of them and 2 more of them is 5 of them. That is, $3x + 2x = 5x$.

4 It was rather arbitrary to write the adjective on top and the noun on the bottom. It would have been just as logical to write the denominator on top and the numerator on the bottom. In this case, it would still be correct to say that we can't add the numerators ("bottoms") unless the denominators ("tops") are the same. However, because the numerators are now on the bottom, it would be incorrect to say that we can't add the top numbers unless the bottoms are the same.

Taking the Distance Out of Education

Shirley Cassarà

When an institution establishes a mission or vision statement, it ostensibly tells the prospective student what can be expected in the experience of studying at that institution. What characteristically sets community colleges apart from baccalaureate level colleges is the level of support for learning that is offered. Traditionally, community colleges stand for access at all levels. If all things were financially equal for a prospective student, why should they choose to study on campus or on-line at a community college?

If we are to be as good as our statements, it will be because the student-to-be ascertains a willingness on the part of the college to support what to him or her may be a form of risk-taking by simply enrolling in one or more college courses. The risk may be financial, emotional, intellectual or a combination of these, necessitating the existence of an extensive support system that is not assumed to be part of the mission of the four-year college. If we at the community college level do not carry this part of our mission forward into the classroom and its management, we are being disingenuous; letting students flounder and all too often drop out.

In the late nineteen seventies, Bunker Hill Community College conducted its first study of the elements that contribute to retention and attrition.[1] The unequivocal result was that students remain in class and, by extension, enrolled in college, when they feel a personal connection to their instructor. This result has been substantiated by many studies in many places in the intervening years. How successfully we have globally built on this information is open for discussion. Differences in opinion on how and, in some cases, whether, an instructor holds an obligation to offer opportunities to students to form a personal bond is still debated; mostly by instructors whose temperaments do not lend themselves to personal interaction.

Even while this dynamic is not taken for granted in the comportment of the classroom, we have added an alternative mode of educational opportunity, commonly referred to as "distance learning," which creates the happenstance of physical separation between teacher and student. This is significant unless the course design consciously makes provision for establishing connection and a sense of group membership.

As the result of many years of participatory research, it is this author's belief that learning is more effective for both learner and teacher, in any delivery format, when both teacher and student make a connection at the level with which they are both comfortable. Although this basic principle would seem to apply universally, we do not need to look beyond the walls of BHCC, where it has been substantiated over and over again.

Coinciding with my studies of educational policy and good practice in teaching, my research on learning styles and disabilities has revealed some interesting connections. The necessity of designing curriculum, teaching methods and assessments to accommodate the rich mélange of learning styles that present themselves in the classroom has had an unexpected, yet welcome, consequence. The teaching practices and classroom management techniques that have come about as a result of addressing diverse learning styles has also had the effect of promoting community and reducing physical and psychological distance within the classroom.

Distance in the learning environment can occur as a result of shyness, reticence and lack of confidence on the part of the students, the teacher, or both. Unexpectedly, techniques which aid students with disabilities have, in my experience, promoted a sense of commitment and community in the classroom. For example, students with difficulty writing are aided by group work, which eases the embarrassment and struggle that would otherwise have been evident. Students with reading impairments are helped when testing for the whole class is in fixed pairs whereby the impaired readers will have the questions read aloud by their partners without any need to call attention to the arrangement. As a general rule, it is recommended to enlarge print wherever possible and to make sure that test questions are carefully constructed to avoid double negatives and colloquialisms, which confuse both dyslexic readers and non-native speakers of English alike.

The act of working through test information together, for which the partners receive the same grade, promotes a strong commitment by the individual to his or her partner, in particular, and to the class in general.

This technique of pairing students for testing or working on projects can be applied within distance learning formats when, for example, students are asked to work collaboratively by having their partners provide feedback on assignments via telephone or email before submitting them to the instructor.

The affective dimension of the teacher-learner relationship has been a key factor in the success of many projects throughout the college's history. For example, in the late nineteen seventies, we mounted a learning community *par excellance* in the SIMSOC model. SIMSOC, which stands for "simulated society," was organized around five courses grouped together and taken by one cohort group of first semester students.

SIMSOC was first developed as a freshman orientation for Harvard University students and was run as a two-week intensive. The course curricula were built on a common theme that allowed the group to build, support and examine a society. Therefore, the need to confront the tension and nervousness of entering the world of academia felt by most students was built into the design. In the process, an appropriate comfort level was achieved that allowed the students to gain access to the college infrastructure (especially the survival resources) at least to the extent that they could navigate and seek help.

There has never been better retention and commitment in a group of students at BHCC. When their semester was over, they would clamber for more. The anecdotal evidence (which sadly is all that is left to us as this experience predated by twenty years the current interest in classroom action research) speaks of this result being repeated semester after semester with each new cohort group. From the students' comments, one can assume that the ingredient that they found most important in this experience was the sense of belonging and the ability to state their role and importance in the group structure. Abraham Maslow has outlined this need as preceding the ability to achieve a sense of self-esteem, a level many of us believe is essential to success in learning at a college level.

Professor Judy Tully, who taught the math component, reports that the program provided tremendous moral support for students because there was, by virtue of the society that was created, a caring and supportive network which connected them both in subject area study and in the initiation to the college experience. It was also easier, she remembers, to keep track of the needs of individual students because there was a group of instructors who could share notes and the responsibilities of providing moral and academic

support.[2] This directly addresses the need for instructors to achieve a comfort level with each individual group of students.

In one section of Psychology 107 (Group Dynamics) in the Spring 2000 semester, my students and I examined the characteristics of communication that encourage students in their initial contacts with the instructor which allows them to make the decision, conscious or unconscious, to continue to attend the class and subsequently to invest their commitment to it. It soon became apparent that this culturally diverse group was intrigued and, in some cases, passionate about this subject. We applied for, and were awarded, a Perkins Diversity Grant to pursue this topic and create course materials which addressed our findings. The learning and self-discovery which this group experienced started on the first day of class and was still accumulating when in the last moment of the unusual final exam came and the class reluctantly disbanded. They successfully created a model curriculum for the first one or two class meetings of any course that incorporated their most salient findings.

The result of our work is a one or two part lesson plan entitled "How Do I Know Thee?"[3] which provides an instructor with outline, rationale, instructions and resources for introducing the class and teacher to each other through an examination of proverbs collected from around the world. Students are asked to work in small groups, each of which is assigned a random group of proverbs to discuss and present to the class. The materials guide the instructor in how to make use of this group work by engaging the students in a discussion of how proverbs can reflect the expectations people have of each other and especially how they reflect expectations of comportment in relation to an academic setting. For the second class, students are asked to collect some proverbs of their own, and then reassemble in small groups to compare their individual discoveries and discuss the various levels of meaning proverbs can have.

Once a course is underway, there are many possible techniques that serve to foster the connection the students feel they have established within the classroom community. This technique has been used by a number of instructors over several semesters, all of whom report that a very different climate is created in the classroom — one which is of unity and has laid the groundwork for trust. This material is equally usable in the real or virtual classroom. What it is required in both is the willingness and ability to organize students into small groups. From the study of the nature of group

effectiveness, an ice-breaking exercise such as this brings groups to a higher level of productivity in rapid fashion, based on the premise that they now have a working relationship and have developed loyalty and purpose in the endeavor.

Continuing with the idea that there is enormous value in establishing the mutual perception of the class as a community, collecting individual biographies to be posted on-line for the virtual classroom and spoken or read in the actual classroom is another elegant technique for giving students the assurance that they are recognized as individuals who merit attention and respect from the instructor. This technique requires the on-line instructor to lead the way in posting his or her own biographical information and photograph, thereby encouraging students to take the next step of posting their own profiles. This, in turn, becomes a form of making a commitment to the virtual class, parallel to in-class participation.

In both Web-based as well as other distance learning contexts, instructors require students to make home videos to introduce themselves, express their opinions and provide biographical information. This process will be much easier to facilitate as we enter the age of computer-top digicams and increased bandwidth when live interactive video may become the norm. Even before these sophisticated technologies become commonplace, threaded discussions and live chats are ways of inviting students to become part of the virtual community. Done well, this can give the student the requisite rationale to believe that the proposed academic undertaking has a teacher/mentor who is, in the student's mind, worthy — a person who is human, seems accessible, and is respectful.

In all types of learning environments, on-going assessment of the students' comprehension, and ability to apply the course material is a particularly responsible way of fostering a relationship that serves learning; learning for both the instructor and students. Assessment within the realm of the actual or virtual classroom includes any of a number of ungraded and graded techniques used by instructors to gauge how closely the students' learning is in line with what the teacher thinks he or she is teaching. In the world of assessment or classroom action research this is usually referred to as "closing the feedback loop."

Being able to keep a finger on the pulse of real-time learning in the classroom allows the instructor to make curricular adjustments that will help both the students and teacher to be able to meet the course objectives within

the time allotted. These techniques allow a bridge between teacher and student and help the teacher to adapt the delivery of the course material to make a more appropriate connection. This may mean changing the format of a course from pure lecture to one which includes cooperative learning experiences or even to see the application of the material through service learning. It may also mean adjusting the style and manner of graded assignments to better reflect the teacher's needs to know what a student is learning and achieving.

Nongraded assessments, which serve to enhance the teacher's awareness of knowledge gained, also seem to serve the purpose of training the students to engage in metacognition; an examination and monitoring of their own learning and cognitive gains. This skill does not remain course-specific but is a skill that transfers to all academic endeavors henceforth. Participatory research is now showing that students who have begun monitoring their own learning are more conscious of opportunities for doing so and, in fact, complain when an instructor does not employ techniques for the nongraded assessment of the amount of mastery of the course material the student has gained.

Accepting the paradigm that motivation and retention are heightened by the connection the student feels with the instructor and the class, educational formats such as web-based courses need special scrutiny. "Distance education," as it is so often labeled, is routinely touted for being of ultimate convenience to the student; the busy parent can study when the children are in bed, the shift worker can resume study at one o'clock in the morning. Inherent in this "convenience" is the condition of isolation. If an attempt made at an assignment requires help, is it available at one o'clock in the morning? What forms will this needed help take? Will it be a library reference or, more specifically, how to get to the [cyber]library? Will it be a low morale problem that an encouraging word from the teacher in or after class would have helped? Will it be a need for tutoring support for a particularly sticky math problem that makes going to bed seem like a reasonable alternative? Will it be a need that in the context of the classroom would have been resolved in a cooperative learning setup either provided by the teacher or in a student-established study group?

When we picture ourselves in a higher education setting, we are also visualizing our zones of comfort and our zones of unease. For both personal and cultural reasons, we obviously are not created with equal comfort zones,

which is something that the skillful classroom teacher can often manage with less premeditation than it will take for the teacher in the "distance" milieu. Please be assured that there is no confusion here between the need for a level of comfort and assurance that what the student has undertaken is reasonable in terms of possible completion and the maxim that *tension precedes change*. Some teachers would argue that comfort breeds complacency and that students would not be inspired to learn unless they felt challenged.

From the world of cognitive neuropsychology, we learn that new learning bears an emotional label. The body alerts, as in the fight or flight response, and so the initial contacts with the new learning had better have a positive valence or we will withdraw (Vygotsky). What educational and developmental psychology teaches us is that we, as learners, will only consent to being challenged at ever increasing levels of difficulty if there continues to be a scaffold available should we need it (Wolfe). The scaffold for each student may look different according to the topical, procedural or academic struggles that confront that individual.

It is, therefore, incumbent on all of us, as teachers, to consciously acknowledge that we conduct the orchestra and can make or break the opportunities for success and commitment which our students encounter from the time they first "enter" our classrooms.

Endnotes

1 Conducted during the summer of 1976 by a committee headed by Dr. Joseph Marron.

2 In the SIMSOC model, all instructors met regularly to set and review the curriculum and the assignments.

3 Copies of "How Do I Know Thee?" are available from the author at Bunker Hill Community College.

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The "Producing Writers" Challenge for Developmental and Second Language Writers (And, Oh Yes, The Rewards, Too!)

Timothy M. McLaughlin

What happens when high school English teachers and college composition instructors respond to the work of one another's students? What happens when high school writers and college writers share their work with each other? What is the value of such collaboration?

These are just a few of the questions that the Producing Writers project sought to answer during its three-year run from the fall of 1997 through its wrap-up in the summer of 2000. Producing Writers, a project underwritten by the Fund for the Improvment of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) and directed by Dr. Jay Simmons of the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, brought together college writing teachers (Bunker Hill Community College, University of New Hampshire, Boston University and Boston College) and English teachers from Boston public high schools and Manchester (New Hampshire) Central High School. It was my good fortune to be part of this project from its beginning.

During the first year of the project, we focused on finding common ground. Where can high school and college English instructors come together? We designed a series of common writing assignments and developed evaluation rubrics for each assignment. We then tried the assignments out on ourselves and posted our essays to one another on the Internet, soliciting comments from one another, just as we would require our students to do in the project's second and third years.

In the second year of the project, we paired off — one high school teacher, one college teacher — each of us linking one of our classes, a college composition section with a high school English class. For four semesters, I integrated Producing Writers assignments and peer response activities into a section of College Writing I (ENG111). My students exchanged their work via the Internet by posting work to a common Website. The first year, we

used a site called *ExchangeSpace*, supported by Houghton Mifflin, and the second year we used *eGroups* with 11th and 12th grade writers who were taking a creative writing class at Manchester Central High School in New Hampshire. My high school colleague and I coordinated the assignments and responded to the work of one another's students.

My classes each semester were almost the same in terms of composition of students — a smattering of students who had been placed directly into the College Writing I level and a preponderance of "developmental" students — i.e., students who had spent a semester or more in developmental writing classes before enrolling in my course. Among this developmental group, there were a significant number of writers for whom English was a second language. In essence, there were two groups here, the "traditional" developmental or basic writer for whom English was a first language, and the writer for whom English was a second language. Within that second group of second language writers there were two divisions as well: some of the second language writers were sophisticated readers and writers in their first language, while others (most) would be considered developmental writers in their first language as well. Some of these second language writers had been in ESL courses, perhaps for several semesters, before taking the developmental writing course that served as a bridge to the college-level composition course. Others had high school diplomas, good listening and speaking skills, but weak writing skills.

These two groups — the traditional developmental writer and the writer for whom English is a second language — found real challenges in dealing with the Producing Writers assignments and the peer response activities that were so integral to the project. Yet despite these challenges, there were rewards — both for these writers and for the instructor.

Among the many things I learned during my Producing Writers experience, this was among the most important: developmental writers and writers for whom English is a second language can succeed with assignments we might generally assume beyond their reach.

The Challenges

The PW curriculum — i.e., the writing assignments themselves and the concomitant peer review and response process — proved tough going for many developmental and second language writers. In general, developmental writers lack experience not only as writers but as thinkers. Many of the

students I encounter in my writing classes have not been required to do much writing in their high school careers. They have certainly done little of the reflective kind of writing that the Producing Writers assignments require. And, for almost all of them, responding to one another's work was a novel and unnatural activity. So while it was true that the students I encountered in College Writing I had earned a seat by passing at least one required developmental course, most had yet to emerge from the chrysalis of their "developmental-ness."

The difference between those students who had been placed directly into College Writing I and those who had spent a semester or two in a basic writing class was obvious from the first class meeting. The initial writing samples show this. The Producing Writers writing sample prompt was simple and straightforward:

> *Write about something you know about and care about. Make sure your readers know how much you know and how much you care. Remember to include details that will help your readers know your subject.*

Keeping in mind that most of my students had just finished a developmental writing course the previous semester that required a paragraph-length in-class composition as proof of the student's readiness to move on, it's no wonder that developmental students in the class often wrote very brief pieces. Given the opportunity to do just about anything with this writing sample, many students took the safest, most cautious route. (Of course this, they have learned, is one way to minimize error.) These same students tended also to write about a person as the "something" they knew about: a friend, a parent.

Students who had been placed directly in College Writing I — no developmental level required — wrote extemporary pieces about "things" rather than people: hobbies, a special place, a workplace. These pieces also tended to be longer, filling two or more pages, and consisted of multiple paragraphs.

So here was challenge one: a natural reticence on the part of developmental writers — and many second language writers — to extend themselves and take chances. Another of the challenges encountered was that many developmental writers are not prone to reflection about their lives or about their writing. Such reflection was a critical component of the Producing Writers project. Portfolio comments on the personal essay (PW1) were a

good example of this. In one respect, it was the most accessible of the four Producing Writers assignments, which was of course intentional on our part, as we wanted students to write about what they knew about: themselves. Such comments came up in their portfolio cover sheets and their "Dear Reader" letters. Noreen[1] is representative in this regard:

> *Dear Reader,*
>
> *Here are three essays that I wrote this semester. I chose my PW1 because it speaks from with in. It's titled Personal Essay because I'm speaking about myself and some of my experiences.*
>
> *I thought that if I spoke about myself then it would seem more realistic to other readers. Whenever I write I try to use something that I know about. I know that I can be more effective with my writing if I have some insight about the situation...*

Students most often selected the personal essay (PW1) as their best essay. This was in part because it was the first piece of the semester, which meant they had more time to work on it and that it probably had gone through more drafts than other pieces. These were also among the longest pieces written, so there was pride in writing an extended composition. (Putting a lot of time and effort into a piece is cited over and over again as a reason why a piece shows the writer is a good writer.) Students felt good about composing an extended narrative and using chronology as a means of organization and providing detail to flesh out the narrative.

Students also were asked to identify anything that presented difficulty in writing the paper. Typical responses include:

> *...I didn't know how to start it off and make it all make sense.*
>
> *I had a problem getting all of my emotional feelings onto paper...*
>
> *Grammar and punctuation...*
>
> *It was hard trying to remember the events exactly how it happened*

What's interesting here is that students rarely picked up on the thing that did indeed give them most difficulty: trying to figure out the significance of this event, both for themselves and for the reader. While reflection comes easily to few students, it is an even bigger problem for developmental writers.

Another of the difficulties for developmental writers is dealing with other sources. Any piece that involved dealing with sources proved difficult.

Integrating material from a source or sources effectively was a daunting task for many of these students. It's no wonder that writing from experience was the preferred mode. And yet for a few students there was great satisfaction in pulling off one of these pieces.

Both groups — developmental writers and second language writers — had great reluctance in sharing work with one another. They also were very insecure about responding to one another's writing. This is, again, something with which basic writers have had little experience. These students often gave the most superficial and least helpful comments to one another. As instructor I found I had to "teach response." I found I had to monitor very closely the writing and subsequent posting of responses. Again, in contrast, the more experienced writers needed much less assistance in this process.

Some second language writers may have been more sophisticated thinkers — in fact, some of the brightest students in the class were second language writers — but their language problems were often an impediment to understanding what other student writers were saying. Language issues may also have affected their ability to respond. Writers with good insights may have been reluctant to share these ideas because of their insecurities about expressing themselves in English. One of my colleagues tells the story of a frustrated English-as-a-second language writer who blurts out, "But you don't understand! I'm brilliant in my own language!"

These, then, were the basic difficulties:

- difficulty in writing extended pieces and writing about "things" outside themselves,
- difficulty in reflecting about their writing,
- difficulty in dealing with sources,
- difficulty in responding to one another.

Having identified these challenges of the Producing Writers program for developmental writers and second-language writers, let's look at some of the benefits derived. Here are a few of the things I've learned as my students and I grappled with the challenges Producing Writers provided.

The Rewards

First, and perhaps most importantly, I've learned that you can give challenging assignments to developing writers.

There is one strain of thought current among writing teachers that it is better to focus on very basic, accessible tasks before moving on to more challenging tasks. This thinking promotes the belief that once a student masters the paragraph he or she is then ready to move onto the essay (by which is meant the five paragraph essay or 500-word theme). And once that is mastered, the student is ready to move on to the research paper.

There is another strain of thinking that holds we can still teach paragraph writing skills and essay writing skills but also challenge students more, make them stretch further. The Producing Writers experience bears this out. At this point I would have no hesitation integrating Producing Writers-like assignments into a developmental course. As a result of looking at and responding to the writing of high school students, I cannot see any reason why a student in a developmental writing course can not tackle the same kinds of assignments.

As for the College Writing I course, the more open-ended Producing Writers assignments compelled students to explore places the more conventional five paragraph theme would have never allowed them to go. It needs to be pointed out that most of the Producing Writers essays submitted by students were far longer than the conventional five paragraph theme — most of them longer than 1000 words, some of them far longer.

While students by and large liked the personal essay best, my own favorite assignment was PW2 — an essay that focused on "place" and required students to synthesize personal experience with research. Sofya's essay on Boston Common is a good example. The first step of the assignment required simple, straightforward description of a place or a thing. Upon completing this stage of the assignment, students were required to do some research. After writing up their research, students put together an essay that combined description, research and reflection. As a recent émigré from Russia, Sofya saw Boston Common as a pleasant urban park that she crossed often. Her research told her it was far more. In her final paragraphs, having done some research and having had some time to think about the place, Sofya had this to say:

> *After two years I am familiar with the Common, my attitudes towards it have changed. Before, when I was there, I simply enjoyed the view and the weather....Now in addition to it, I am drawing a picture of the old Common. I see people all dressed up — women in long dresses with bonnets on their heads, men in pretty suits — getting out of the boats.*

On the other hand, I see an old thick tree and many people. Some of the people are crying, while others are hanged and don't feel anything anymore. Pictures like these sometimes appear in my mind.

During its more than three and a half century, Boston Common has seen a lot of good and bad. It has evolved from a pasture field to a green park which serves as a land of relaxation for many people of different ages. It's also a place for walking, and public celebrations. The past of the Common reflects all the history of Boston and that of America as well.

This essay took Sofya (and the reader) to places a standard five-paragraph theme would not have gone. Sofya, no doubt, could have written a perfectly competent 500-word essay — perhaps titled "Three Reasons Why I Like Boston Common" — but we can see her essay "What Is Boston Common?" is a much more substantive, much more interesting piece of writing. As she says at one point in describing the Common, "I don't stop here, I go deeper into the park." She does indeed!

This leads us to a second important finding: that reflection is important, especially for writers who are not naturally inclined to thinking about their writing, a category that includes almost all developmental writers. This takes us again back to the personal essay — and why students often found it an attractive assignment (its personal focus) and why they also found it so difficult. In the design stage this assignment was simply a personal narrative. Those of us who proposed this type of assignment followed the lead of so many rhetorics, which find the narrative the most congenial place for students to begin: it's simple, it's direct, a student draws upon personal experience to tell a story. But Producing Writers project director Jay Simmons wasn't satisfied with this. He insisted that reflection be built into this assignment — as such reflection was at the very core of the Producing Writers endeavor. He was, of course, absolutely correct.

And, of course, this was also the hardest part of the assignment for the students. Writing a narrative, once they had focused on a "significant incident," was not so very difficult for most students. (Finding this incident was sometimes difficult. Some students could not see anything in their lives as significant. One student said as much and ultimately never did the assignment.) The truly tough part was getting students to think about what this event meant. I had students who told interesting stories but were absolutely at a loss to delve into the meaning of these events. Early drafts of

these papers were narratives pure and simple. Noreen is a good example. She was able to go on at great length — pages and pages! — about an event that ultimately led to her dropping out of high school, but in the first and second drafts there is nothing about how this affected her life, nothing about how this event might be of interest to a reader. The final drafts did take her more closely to the heart of the assignment. Noreen ends her piece in this way:

> *That was a hard experience and it taught me that lies and disbelief can be very destructive, and mentally painful. I also know that a good education along with hard work is the makings of a successful person. That experience definitely made me a stronger person than I had been. I had never given education the credit it so rightfully deserved.*
>
> *If I had graduated and got my diploma thirty years ago, I would have been able to get a good job. Today if you're lucky you can get a good job, but in order to make a decent career, you need at least a year and a half or two years of college as well. When I wrote about that incident, it stirred up some emotions that I tried to suppress. Even through all of that I'm still going to strive for more education, and I advise others to do the same.*

While some readers might see these two paragraphs as artificially grafted on to the end of a narrative — and might prefer to see reflection throughout the piece rather than "tacked on" at the end — there is no doubt that these 150 words, in an essay of 1300 words, take the piece to a deeper level.

Developing a sense of audience is crucial to one's growth as a writer. This for many students, especially developmental writers, is in essence crossing a great divide. Responding to one another's writing assignments was an important part of developing a sense of audience. Kerry has made progress in this regard in her response to her high school partner's PW1:

> *This is a nice start for a first draft. Good use of sensory details such as: how you felt while you were lost and the panic that was gradually growing inside you as you wandered through the woods. Where is Candia? Exactly how familiar are you with the woods surrounding your house? How did the police become involved? One thing that I would suggest changing is don't assume that the reader knows anything about where all of this is taking place.*

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Of course, Kerry, a city girl from Boston doesn't know much about New Hampshire. There were so many differences that separated my students from their high school partners, not just a state line. My students were from many countries; a significant number spoke English as their second language. Most were older; there were single mothers. They worked, many to pay rent and feed their families. They had significant responsibilities. They lived in a highly urban environment. Their world was very different from the world of the New Hampshire high school students with whom they exchanged work. These young people — many of them bright and a good number of them better readers and better writers than the students I worked with — were, well, young. Things that seemed awfully important to a high school student — social life, sports, cars — seemed less significant to some of my students, who were trying to raise kids, work and go to school. In grappling with these differences, students achieved a better sense of audience — and became more effective writers as a result.

One of the high school students, obviously a bright young man with a keen interest in philosophy, writes an argument (PW4) about the "meaning of meaning." Here are his first two paragraphs:

> *The idea of meaning is essential to conscious life; we cannot bear the thought of a meaningless universe. Thus in part religion was invented out of this need. First, a thing is meaningful because it is valued. Man created beings higher than himself for the purpose of being valued by them. This gives mankind meaning, because he is valued.*
>
> *Western civilization is in the post-Christian era. As a result of the death of God, who had prior to his fall given us meaning, nihilism pervades much thought; we have lost that sole entity in God which valued our species. No other species suffers from this affliction, that of not being valued by another species. Man alone has this problem because he is the ruler of the Earth, and nothing may prey upon him (which would give Man value). Therefore with no valuer to give man value, he is rendered meaningless. Only at first glance however...*

Now, truthfully, I'm not sure exactly what he means by all this. So if I'm a little confused by this, what will his fellow writers at the community college think of this piece? Has he really thought about his partners and how best to communicate his argument? Did he think my students, many of whom are devout churchgoers, would buy into his "God is dead" pronouncement —

or that they might be offended by this? This was probably big news for some of his readers, to find they were now living in a "post-Christian" era. Was the writer trying to impress his reader with his logic? Whatever the case, those charged with responding to this piece had a tough time. Miriam, herself a Jehovah's Witness and a student for whom English is not a first language, responded tactfully and effectively. She writes:

> *Dear Paul,*
>
> *Hello, how are you? Well it's me, Miriam, here to give you some comments on your pw4. Where do I begin, it took me four or five times to read your piece and I still could not understand where you were getting at. First off, your piece was too complicated to follow. Some of the things that I did understand, I couldn't agree with. For instance, your belief on religion was one of the things I didn't agree with. Many of your analysis had no back up, which made it hard to believe anything you said. Please don't feel discouraged, it is just my opinion. Maybe if you can be just a little more clear on your topic I could have understood better. I still think you are a very intelligent person so don't get me wrong.*

One of the other divides we had to cross was that our paired courses were very different. While mine was the fairly standard College Writing I, my high school colleague had the tough task of merging the Producing Writers format into a creative writing course. For the argumentative assignment (PW4), she suggested that her students create a dialogue between two characters, each taking an opposing point of view on an issue they wished to explore. One student, Robert, focused on the requirement in New Hampshire that teens not drive others until they had negotiated a three-month probationary period:

> *The Ninety Day Rule*
>
> *It was a dark and stormy night. Two gorillas walk into a bar. One says, "Wow, we sure tricked whoever is reading this. They got sucked right into this paper after a couple of sentences!"*
>
> *"Ha ha ha ha ha ha...." the gorillas laugh in unison.*
>
> *Meanwhile, adolescent Jonathan walks in after showing the bouncers his fake I.D. He sees his 21 year old friend David and walks over to chat.*
>
> *Dave spots his friend walking towards him. " 'Sup Johnny?" he says.*
>
> *"Hey Dave," John responded. "What are those gorillas laughing about?"*

"I don't know," answered Dave. "They just walked in here, one of them said something, and they've been laughing since. Their laughing sounds kind of whacked," he chuckled. John didn't grin an inch.

"What's wrong?" asks a concerned Dave.

"I just got my license and I can't even use it for anything but fake I.D.'s."

"Shhhh, not so loud," cautioned Dave as a bouncer looked over.

"What did you say?" the big man demanded.

"Um.... I said anything cuts Jake's weeds," countered John.

"Oh...okay." The bouncer walked away to break up a fight.

"Anyway, why can't you drive?" asked Dave.

"Because of a 90-day rule. Remember how I've been driving with my parents since I was fifteen and a half; well, I still have to wait for ninety days even though I have my license. The rules haven't changed at all."

"Wait, what is all this? I didn't have to do that when I got my license," responded Dave.

"Well, you were 18. Because of a two year difference there's a big rule change," said John getting frustrated.

[Robert has his two characters discuss the pros and cons of this law. He then moves into his conclusion.]

All of a sudden a drunken man hollered, "I'll tell you when I've had enough!" at the bartender. He threw a mug at the gorillas and that started a huge fight.

"Let's get out of here!" yelled Dave. They ran towards the doors with a gorilla following them.

"Get in the car before the gorilla wrecks it!" cried John.

"Wait, you've been drinking, I should drive!" Dave stated.

"But you can't because of the ninety–day rule!" said John as he started the car and drove off.

They escaped from the gorilla but were killed in a drunk driving accident

since Dave couldn't drive even though he had his license all because of the ninety-day rule.

A fun, creative piece. Imagine, though, the consternation of Sun, a student from Korea who had only been in this country for one year, a writer who is still learning to negotiate the treacheries of the English language and American culture. Here is how he responds to Robert:

Dear Robert,

How are you doing? This is Sun from Bunker Hill Community College. I'm so pleased to read your writing again. It is exciting and funny like the last one. It seems to be a kind of creative style which I have never expected before.

First of all, I could catch your point very easily. I had had no idea about the Ninety Day Rule before I read yours. You let me know what it is. Furthermore, your position is so obvious that I notice very easily that your are against the Ninety Day Rule like John in your paper.

Even though you told us why the Ninety Day Rule is irrational, it seems to me that you don't have enough supporting argument. You allocated only one page out of three to explain why the Ninety Day Rule is wrong. It seems to be that you focused on the opposing point of view. The opposing point is that there are too many teenage driving accidents. And you contradicted this point. It is great; however, I think you'd better write more about your supporting argument. I mean if you put these two points, your point and supporting point, you can give readers more information than you can by one side. It is going to be more persuasive, isn't it? There was no problem to understand what you said; however, the more supporting paragraphs you have, the more persuasive your writing becomes.

The last sentence, "They escaped from the gorillas but were killed in a drunk driving accident since Dave couldn't drive even though he had his license." was not clear to me. They had some alternatives. They could call a taxi and so on. Now, they died, and do you say that it is because of the Ninety Day Rule not because of drinking driving? It seems to me a kind of exaggeration.

I have a question about two gorillas. It might be my problem; however, I can't understand why did you write about gorillas at the beginning of your paper. What was your intention? Your moving from fake I.D. to

driving license is very smooth and continuously. It is coherent. But I couldn't fine the connection between two gorillas and the others.

As I told you before, I'm just telling you my opinion. It is up to you if you accept or ignore this. I'm not sure if my comments are right or not because I'm still learning English writing. There are some differences between Korean and English writing. However, I read yours very carefully and try to give you advice as much as possible no matter what it is a kind of compliment or correction. Good Luck!

Best Wishes, Sun

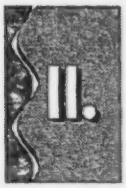
Clearly, there is much value in this reciprocal process of reading and responding to one another's pieces. Clearly, Sun has crossed the great divide: "the audience gap." He reaches out to Robert and in so doing makes a connection that will benefit them both.

I hope what comes across here is that the challenges identified in the first part of this paper dovetail nicely with the rewards recounted in the second part. We find that in writing extended pieces (1000 words or more), developmental and second-language writers, often cautious by nature and wary of making error, stretch out as writers in ways not encouraged by shorter, more modest assignments. We find that students who are not prone to reflection gain much as writers by thinking about their pieces and by responding to assignments that integrate reflection. We also find that assignments that bring reading and research into the mix enhance the process of exploration, reflection and meaning making. We find that as students develop an enhanced sense of audience (through reading and responding to one another's work), student writing becomes more sharply focused, better shaped, and better developed. Above all, we find that challenging assignments, coupled with peer review and response, help all students to become better writers.

Certainly, these are lessons of import for any writing teacher. They will certainly continue to inform my own work. However, I believe the Producing Writers lessons have value for those in other disciplines as well, especially for those of us who use writing as a means of measuring learning and who endeavor to help students develop critical thinking skills. Carefully thought out writing assignments that encourage student reflection and provide opportunities for students to share work with one another should produce more than better writers: students should become better learners as well.

Endnote

1 Names have been changed to protect anonymity, and excerpts from student writings are presented without correction, in their original form.



GETTING HERE

Pelonomie K. Khumoetsile-Taylor

Arthur M. Centanni

Melanie Nguyen

Access to Higher Education for African Americans

Pelonomi K. Khumoetsile-Taylor

In a day and time when more people are going to college, access to higher education for African Americans is a cause for concern. For those who are attending these institutions, issues of retention and graduation are also cause for concern. Problems related to access, retention, and graduation occur at both Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and predominately white colleges and universities. Yet, there is some good news in that more federal funds may be allocated for college retention programs. Representative Chaka Fattah (Democrat PA), introduced a college retention proposal in the 106th Congressional session. He then re-introduced the proposal in the 107th Congressional Session. Unfortunately, the last major action taken on the proposed legislation occurred on November 14, 1999, when the bill was referred to the House Education and Workforce Committee. The legislation, entitled the *William H. Gray III College Completion Challenge Grant Program of 1999* (H.R. 3223) is a $35 million program that was a part of the Clinton Administration's fiscal 2001 budget proposal. If H.R. (House Resolution) 3223 is signed into law, colleges and universities could receive grants for a variety of retention ideas including funding for pre-summer freshman programs, on-campus support programs, and financial incentives for the neediest students (i.e. financial aid that is above the current maximum Pell Grant levels).

In the meantime, institutions continue to grapple with issues related to African American and other minority group preparation for and access to higher education. These efforts include attempts to address problems in recruitment, college entry, retention, and graduation success. Additionally, since 1998, five important reports documenting such efforts and raising public awareness on issues related to minority access to higher education have been released.[1]

The good news is that more minorities, including African American youth, have access to and are making it into college. More specifically, according to *Two Decades of Progress: African Americans Moving Forward in Higher Education Report* (UNCF Report), African American undergraduate enrollment in four-year colleges and universities over the past twenty years has increased at a faster pace than the enrollment rate for white undergraduates (UNCF 2).

African American High School Graduation Rates

A review of high school and college graduation rates indicates that in 1980, eighty-seven percent of whites in the twenty-five to twenty-nine age range earned high school diplomas or GEDs. In 1995, the graduation rates for whites remained at eighty-seven. In 1980, approximately seventy-seven percent of African Americans between the ages of twenty-five through twenty-nine had earned high school diplomas or GEDs. However, in 1995, eighty-seven percent of African Americans in this age group had graduated (UNCF Report 6). This reflects an impressive achievement and gain.

African American College Graduation Rates

In 1980, twenty-three percent of whites in their mid-twenties had graduated from college with bachelors' degrees. In 1995, thirty-one percent of whites in their mid-twenties earned bachelor's degrees. On the other hand, in 1980, only eleven percent of African Americans in their mid-twenties had earned bachelors' degrees. By 1995, only sixteen percent of African Americans, in their mid-twenties had graduated with bachelors' degrees. (UCNF Report 5). In spite of the graduation gains, there is still cause for concern. A comparison of African American undergraduate college and university enrollment rates with those of other minority groups indicates that "between 1990 and 1995, Asian women and Hispanic women...increased their enrollment by 43.9 percent and 42.8 percent respectively" (Nettles, Perna, and Millett 37). Hispanic males increased their enrollment rate by 35.9 percent (38). African American females and African American males only increased their graduation rates by only a mere 18.3 percent and 13.1 percent respectively.

More Bad News

Even with the gains in high school, college, and university graduation rates, the bad news is that across the board, the poor are the least likely to go to college. For example, high school is the highest level of education attained

by 64.6 percent of students from the lowest quartile of socioeconomic status. In contrast, 41.2 percent of students in the highest socioeconomic quartile attain bachelors' degrees and 2.7 percent achieve first professional degrees (Nettles, Perna, and Millet 39).

African Americans are significantly under-represented in our colleges and universities. For those who do enroll, attrition rates are high and too few students are graduating within six years at four-year institutions. Additionally, while many minority students, including African Americans, graduate from community colleges, they do not transfer in sufficient numbers to four-year institutions. Of those who do graduate from our community colleges and get accepted to four-year institutions, far too many are not completing their bachelors' degrees (Weiger and Smith 30). More specifically, African American rates of graduation from four-year institutions, over the past twenty years, have declined from 35.3 to 24.7 percent (Tinto 71-80). Further, the rate at which African American students earned degrees of any kind has declined over the past twenty years from 47.9 percent to 40.2 percent (Tinto 72).

More females than males of all races and at all socio-economic levels are making their way into and are graduating from colleges and universities. The success of African American females is an important and good thing. This success, however, may have broader implications across family, social, economic and political lines than is generally considered or researched when looking at access issues. Education, or the lack of it, is often tied to life opportunity, economic well-being, and social status. The fact that more African American females are attending and graduating from our colleges and universities may, over time, effect the community status, family relationships, and the leadership roles of African American men and women. The increased earning and political power of women may be viewed as a positive outcome. However, we still live in a society where it is accepted, particularly by power brokers and decision makers, that the male of any racial or ethnic group should have superior economic, political and social standing. The shift in earning and political power of women may potentially have devastating effects on African American male esteem and role perception as well as on family and community stability.

Barriers to College Entry and Graduation

The challenge of successfully moving many more African American males and females into and through higher education must be considered and

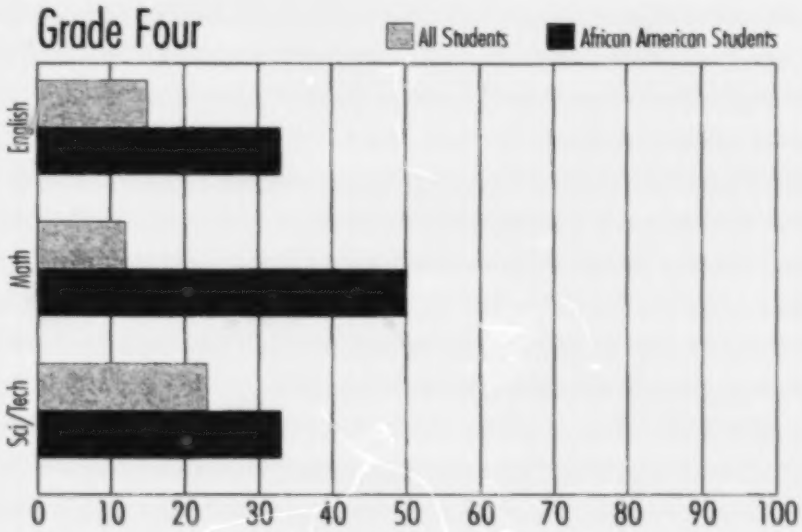
addressed. There appear to be several barriers to college entry, retention and graduation, including personal issues or challenges, lack of meaningful college preparation, and tougher high school graduation requirements. For example, the requirement to pass standardized tests, curricular relevance, culture, geographical location, and lack of money or financial support can also pose daunting challenges (Harris 16). It is important to note that these issues are faced by many students irrespective of race and ethnicity.

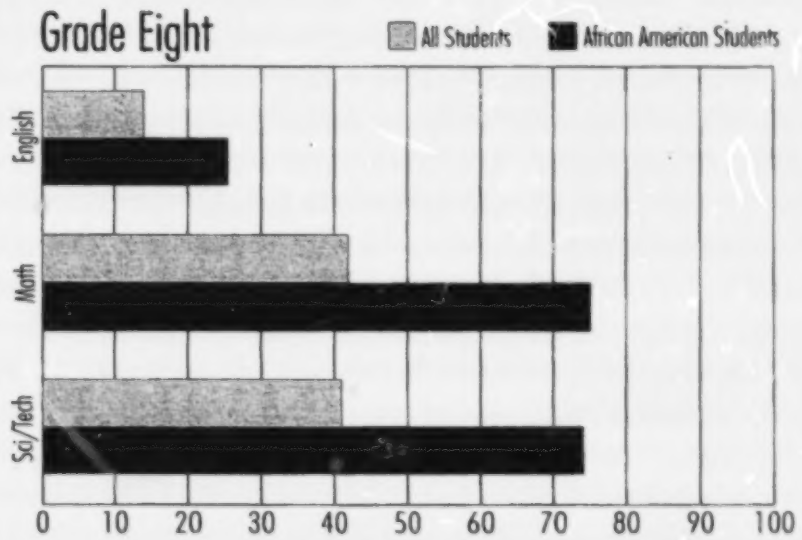
Lack of appropriate academic preparation is a significant challenge that must be met and overcome. For example, the state of Massachusetts will require students to pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System test (MCAS) as a graduation requirement beginning in 2003. The success of minority students on the MCAS, which was administered to children in grades four, eight, and ten in 1998, 1999, and 2000, has been abysmally poor. The substantive areas tested were English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science and Technology. In Spring 2000, students in grades eight and ten were also tested in History/Social Science.

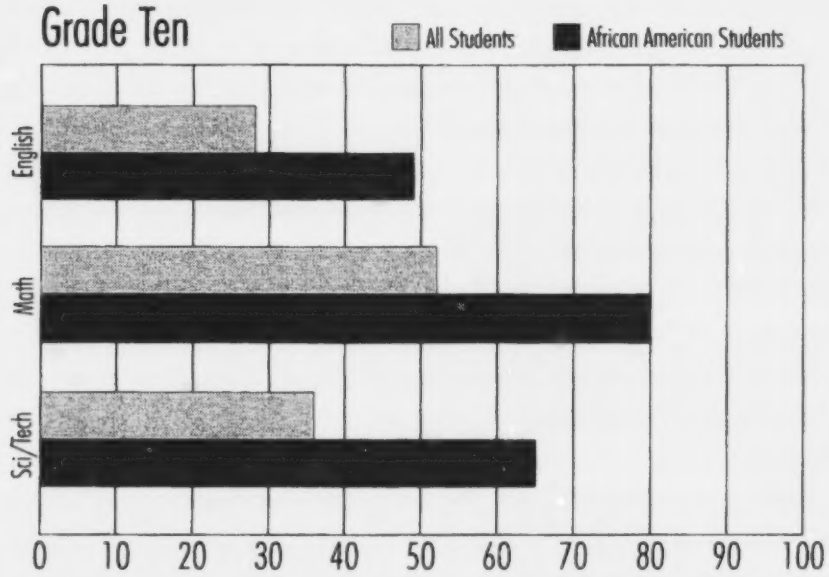
A student's performance on the MCAS is scored as "advanced," "proficient," "needs improvement," or "failing." Reportedly, students at the advanced level are able to demonstrate both a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the subject matter as well as the ability to solve complex problems. Students at the proficient level are reportedly able to demonstrate a solid understanding of the subject matter as well as the ability to solve a wide variety of problems. Students falling within the needs improvement classification demonstrate partial understanding of the subject matter as well as the ability to solve some problems. Finally, students in the failing category are said to demonstrate minimal understanding and lack the ability to solve simple problems. Figure 1 (next two pages) compares the 1998 statewide failure rates for all students with those of African American students in three subject areas at grades four, eight, and ten.

These results indicate that in 1998, thirty-three percent of African American fourth grade students tested failed the English Language Arts section of the MCAS. Fifty percent failed the Mathematics section and thirty-two percent failed the Science and Technology section. At the eighth grade level, twenty-five percent of African American eighth graders failed the English Language Arts section of the MCAS. Seventy-five percent failed the Mathematics section and seventy-four percent failed the Science and Technology section. Forty-nine percent of African American tenth graders

Figure 1: MCAS 1998 Failure Rates Statewide: All Students and African American Students







Source: Massachusetts Department of Education

failed the English Language Arts section of the test. Eighty percent failed the Mathematics section and sixty-five percent failed the Science and Technology section.

Figure 2 (next page) shows MCAS statewide results in each of the three grade levels for 1998 through 2000 for African American students. According to the *Spring 2000 MCAS Tests: Report of State Results*, issued by the Massachusetts Department of Education, the percentage of students overall falling into the failing level is declining and the percentage of students moving into the proficient or advanced levels is increasing (2). However, the percentage of eighth and tenth grade students performing at the failing level in math, science and technology, and history/social science is still too high. Specifically, while African American students showed improvement in many areas, sixty-six percent of those in grade four fell into the needs improvement group in English language arts. Twenty-nine percent fell into the failing group. In mathematics, forty-five percent of the fourth graders fell into the needs improvement group and forty-three percent fell into the failing group. In science and technology, fifty-one percent of the fourth graders fell into the needs improvement group, and twenty-three percent fell into the failing group.

The test results for African American eighth and tenth graders are also discouraging. In mathematics, only seven percent of the eighth graders were

Figure 2: 1998-2000 MCAS Results: Statewide by Race/Ethnicity – African American/Black Students

	Year	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Failing	Scaled Score	Students Included in Score
GRADE 4							
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS	**2000**	**0**	**5**	**66**	**29**	**224**	**5,344**
	1999	0	4	67	29	224	5,523
	1998	0	4	63	33	223	5,324
MATHEMATICS	**2000**	**1**	**11**	**45**	**29**	**223**	**5,406**
	1999	2	9	45	29	223	5,011
	1998	1	7	41	33	221	5,335
SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY	**2000**	**1**	**24**	**52**	**43**	**229**	**5,408**
	1999	1	20	57	44	228	5,007
	1998	1	15	52	50	226	5,335
GRADE 8							**3,924**
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS	**2000**	**1**	**32**	**40**	**23**	**230**	4,416
	1999	0	28	44	22	229	4,301
	1998	0	28	46	32	229	**3,962**
MATHEMATICS	**2000**	**1**	**7**	**20**	**72**	**212**	4,102
	1999	1	6	23	71	213	4,311
	1998	1	7	17	75	212	**3,962**
SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY	**2000**	**1**	**8**	**19**	**73**	**212**	4,080
	1999	1	5	15	80	210	4,311
	1998	0	6	20	74	210	**3,966**
HISTORY/SOCIAL SCIENCE	**2000**	**0**	**1**	**23**	**75**	**211**	4,049
	1999	0	2	21	77	212	–
	1998	–	–	–	–	–	
GRADE 10							**3,409**
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS	**2000**	**1**	**12**	**26**	**60**	**217**	3,505
	1999	1	12	31	57	218	3,227
	1998	1	13	36	49	220	**3,476**
MATHEMATICS	**2000**	**2**	**7**	**14**	**77**	**211**	3,215
	1999	1	5	14	80	209	3,243
	1998	1	5	14	80	209	**3,465**
SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY	**2000**	**0**	**5**	**24**	**70**	**213**	3,201
	1999	0	5	27	68	214	3,243
	1998	0	5	30	65	215	

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education

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in the proficient group. Twenty percent were in the needs improvement group and seventy-two percent were in the failing group. In science and technology, only eight percent of the African American eighth graders were in the proficient group. Twenty percent were in the needs improvement group and seventy-three percent were in the failing group. As for tenth graders, in mathematics, twelve percent of the African American test takers were in the proficient group. Fourteen percent were in the needs improvement group, and seventy-seven percent were in the failing group. Finally, in science and technology, only five percent of African American tenth graders were in the proficient group. Twenty percent were in the needs improvement group and seventy percent were in the failing group.

With the exception of eighth grade English language arts and fourth grade science and technology, there was no significant decrease in failure rates among African American students between 1998 and 2000, and in two areas the percentage of failures actually increased. Should these testing patterns persist over time, large numbers of African American students will not be graduating from high school or moving on to college. Success in the math and science and technology areas are particularly important to college and university preparation and admission because mastery of mathematics, science and technology are important to success in a variety of study areas.

One must ask the question why African American students score so poorly on the MCAS exams. Without a doubt, there are many reasons that explain these test taking failures. If, however, accurate measurement of student ability and the achievement of student success in meeting testing standards are priorities, one of the highly likely reasons for testing failure that should be easy to remedy is the problem of preparation that flows from, or is related to, a lack of textbooks and other educational supplies.

According to Joan Vennochi of the *Boston Globe*, the budget for Boston schools' per pupil allocation for educational supplies has not been increased in at least six years (15). The per pupil distribution formula, for the approximately four million dollars that has been budgeted, includes $55 for elementary students, $62 for middle school students and $71 for high school students. In addition to the monies being earmarked for textbooks, the funds are supposed to pay for, among other things, postage, blackboards, easels, pens, reading tables and floor mats! Students who have had to learn under these circumstances make up a significant proportion of those who look to Bunker Hill Community College as their pathway to higher education.

In the same article, Vennochi surmises that "Boston public schools lag behind other school districts of comparable size and ethnic makeup in closing the racial achievement gap because Boston students don't have textbooks to take home...at Hyde Park High School...it is typical for 25 to 30 students to share four or five books during any given class." And, "since [students] can't take textbooks home, they must rely on their notes for study and homework" (15). According to Vennochi, one student graduated without ever having received a math book. How can these students or any similarly situated students be expected to pass or excel on standardized tests or to be adequately prepared to attend, succeed or graduate from college?

Students who have been unsuccessful in their attempts to pass the MCAS will be able to repeat the test. In fact, Massachusetts, is considering plans to allow unsuccessful students up to four additional opportunities to pass the MCAS exam. Other options include affording students an opportunity to take the exam without having to answer the most difficult question(s) and assisting students to make necessary gains via participation in after school programs and tutoring sessions. Here again, one has to ask, if students who repeatedly fail the MCAS will ultimately be allowed to take the test without having to answer the most difficult questions, how relevant can these questions be and why ask them at all?

Former Governor Cellucci proposed that students who fail the MCAS but complete all other high school requirements be given a certificate of completion. It is not illogical, however, to assume that the student who has not passed the MCAS test and does not have a diploma or a GED will be denied entry into college. And, assuming the MCAS really tests or measures student mastery of relevant subject matter, even if colleges and universities are prepared to accept students with certificates of completion, the question would remain whether or not a student who was unable to pass MCAS is prepared to do college level work. If substantial numbers of African American students cannot pass MCAS or similar tests, it is likely that barriers to higher education barriers will become increasingly difficult to surmount.

As for other types of standardized tests, according to the UNCF Report, in 1996 African American SAT test takers scored 100 points below their white counterparts on both the verbal and math sections of the SAT (UNCF 3). Such results diminish the likelihood of gaining entry into the elite educational colleges and universities. Additionally, once in school, according to Claude Steel, Professor of Social Psychology at Stanford University,

"the grades Black students earn the first semester of college quickly fall behind those of White students with similar standardized test scores" (qtd. in Weissman 1). In other words, according to Professor Steel, "the same achievement level requires better preparation for Blacks than for Whites" (70). Assuming Professor Steel is correct, there are broad implications for retention and graduation success.

There is, however, another point to consider. Does the better preparation that Professor Steel alludes to really relate to academic preparation? For example, if there is a "skin tax" arising from issues of racism and lack of culturally competent teaching and service delivery that must be borne by African American and other minority students which does not have to be paid by white students, this may at least partially explain performance differences. Does the trauma, sense of isolation or alienation explain or partially explain why the grades Black students earn fall behind those of their white counterparts? Does financial worry, the fact that so many African American students are "time poor" (i.e. students are working while going to school, single parents are attending to family issues and day care needs, etc.) further explain the grade disparity? If the answer to some or all of these questions is "yes," even if programs are put in place to address gaps in academic preparation, African American students will continue to drop out or fall behind.

Financial Barriers and Other Challenges

In both secondary and post secondary education, poverty is strongly related to low academic achievement. Additionally, students from low income families, including those from all racial and ethnic groups with above average grades are significantly more likely to leave college without bachelors' degrees than are students with higher incomes (HR 3223). The fact that loans have become the primary source of student aid creates another barrier or source of concern for many African American students because they are reluctant to borrow money for school. Equally important, dependence on loans factors in as a retention issue for those who are in school; the loan burden may also discourage students from applying or going on to graduate school. Another concern arises from the over dependence on loans for college access being borne by those who are required to borrow in order to take remedial courses necessary to do college level work (American Council on Education 16). In other words, high risk students who have been

unconscionably underserved by our public schools are expected to bear the cost associated with closing educational gaps so that they may have a chance to succeed in college.

College and university entry, retention and graduation success rates are further diminished if the individual is a first generation college student, has a low high school grade point average, has postponed or delayed college entry after high school graduation, or is working full-time. These are issues and situations frequently experienced by African Americans. Further, the level of any student's parents' education may influence educational outcomes, as do cultural attributes of the home, community, and school. The level, the concern about, as well as the amount of racial/ethnic prejudice and discrimination the student must face may also influence academic success and educational outcomes.

Finally, the African American student may be further challenged by service delivery gaps. For example, little-to-no service, guidance, or support may be provided to help the high school student gain access to postsecondary schools. Further, school staff may lack the cultural competency skills needed to help the African American student make a successful transition from high school to college.

The foregoing presents a grim picture of the barriers and challenges that must be faced by African Americans who may wish to enter college, and there are additional challenges that must be met by those who gain entry to institutions of higher education. Much more must be done, on all educational fronts, to level the playing field and to ensure that once students gain entry to a college or university they have every opportunity to succeed.

Recommendations

There is a clear need for college retention programs. Therefore, the first recommendation is to pass and fully fund the William Gray III College Completion Challenge Grant Program legislation. Second, The college retention programs will be of little use if adequate numbers of African American, other minority and economically disenfranchised students are not graduating from our high schools. The academic achievement gaps must be closed by, among other things, funding increases and re-allocation and redistribution of per pupil funding formulae for education resources. Third, Bunker Hill Community College has an exciting and viable "Minority Teachers Program," in which potential and future minority teachers are

recruited into the college and are supported through their tenure here. These students are linked by articulation agreements to completing their bachelors' degrees at a university level. The program should be expanded and replicated throughout the college and university system. Fourth, community colleges like BHCC are entering into more articulation agreements with four-year colleges and universities. These agreements ease the path and provide a mechanism for community college students to transfer into four-year institutions of higher education. There is an ongoing attempt to increase the number of these transfer agreements; that work should continue. Fifth, no one should be left behind. More work should be done to recruit African American women into our college and university systems. However, the need remains for special emphasis to be placed on the recruitment, retention, preparation for and promotion of academic excellence and graduation of African American males.

Endnote

1 The five reports are:

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Willie Horton and the Thirty Second Solution: Generations and Resources Sacrificed by Ignorance

Arthur M. Centanni

In the first grainy, black-and-white frames, we see a large, menacing, wild-eyed African American male appear on our television screens. All of our fears, prejudices and hatreds are realized. Willie Horton, in thirty seconds, has changed the landscape of corrections and perhaps politics in America forever. While pandering to our basest fears and prejudices, this political campaign ad and the ensuing "get tough and lock'em up" attitude has brought about a myriad of changes within the corrections and criminal justice system. Our attitude on crime and the methods in we use to deal with crime have changed. We are now witnessing the results of this "thirty second solution."

Incarceration has become a major industry in the United States. The figures tell the story. Of the eight million individuals incarcerated worldwide, fully twenty-five percent (two million) are under care, custody and control in this country. The United States of America now leads the world in this endeavor, surpassing the Communist regimes in China and North Korea, as well as the repressive governments of Russia, South Africa and Iran. In 1999, for the first time in the history of the United States, public money spent to construct prisons exceeded expenditures to build schools.

More disturbingly, a recent study conducted by the Center of Community Alternatives, a New York criminal justice agency, divulged that ten million adolescents in our country have had, or now have, one or both parents incarcerated. These children pose a five-fold greater risk for incarceration than do children whose parents do not have a history of incarceration.

A survey of the costs associated with the corrections system in the United States depicts its gross inefficiencies. The average cost of fabricating a

Acknowledgement: I would like to thank Charles Shairs, Director of Distance Learning at Bunker Hill Community College, for his ideas, dedication and work in helping prepare this paper.

single, adult cell is $200,000, and the price of "locking up" an individual is between $25,000 and $35,000 per year. A prisoner with AIDS or geriatric complications can cost as much as $180,000 per year, and, while a juvenile convicted of arson and placed in a secure facility can cost in excess of $1000 per day, or $365,000 per year. There is not another state, local or federal program that costs so much per recipient to administer. In contrast, the cost to the taxpayer for an individual to attend a community college for a year is about $2,000.

Internationally, the ill will that this incarceration binge has engendered toward the United States is embarrassing. An increasing number of non-U.S. citizens are being incarcerated or deported, and Amnesty International has accused the United States of violating prisoners' rights. Several of these violations have been atrocities involving female inmates. Abuses of human rights, together with increasingly overcrowded conditions and the steady deterioration of inmate education programs, presents an inhumane and regressive image to the rest of the world.

Overcrowding, always a problem in metropolitan area facilities, has increased, and with it so have racial tensions, violence, rape (and with it the prospect of contracting AIDS), drug use and gang membership. Inmates learn quickly that affiliation and allegiance to a gang culture while incarcerated offers protection and status. The overcrowding that precipitates these ills is another reason for inmates to resent and feel victimized by society.

In the general population, African Americans are incarcerated at a rate three to four times greater than that of European Americans, while the ratio widens in less affluent communities. As a result, in many impoverished neighborhoods, children are literally without fathers, husbands and brothers. Functionally, in these communities, an entire generation of males has gone missing, leaving mothers, wives and children behind. Civil rights advocates characterize the situation as a form of genocide.

Given the severity of the problem in the United States, very little has been done to construct workable solutions. As a public brought up on a steady diet of sensationalism and stereotypes via television and radio news, we have been poorly and only partially informed. Have we become an "MTV generation," unable to grasp major issues? Are we now content to listen and absorb only very short sound bites?

Responding to public perceptions, politicians tend to simplify law and order issues. Cognizant of voter emotions, quick fixes to complex, multi-faceted social issues provide cover on the campaign trail. Harsh sentencing is a very appealing way to deal with crimes of every stripe — from drug possession to rape and murder. A "one-size-fits-all" solution to crime is simple and easy to comprehend; it is also disingenuous, anti-intellectual and all too often, wrong. Pandering to the electorate's fears is the easy way out.

The cost of sound bite politics is staggering. One million individuals are incarcerated for sale or possession of illegal drugs. At the costs mentioned above, the treatment and rehabilitation of offenders might seem a certainty. Yet, mounting evidence points to the fact that this nation is losing the war on drugs, and the present prescription to combat addiction is not working. Locking up individuals is not solving anyone's drug problem.

Willie Horton and the thirty second solution to combat crime also presents problems for individuals being released from prison. According to Department of Justice figures, six hundred thousand individuals will have been released by the end of 2001. Of these, most individuals will come out far more dangerous than when they were committed.

The recently announced increase in the year 2000 crime rate in Boston is directly attributable to the release of offenders from prison and their attempts to reclaim drug territory through the use of violence. Simply stated, the drug dealers are "coming out" to recover their neighborhoods for the purpose of selling drugs. Individuals who took over the incarcerated dealers' territories in the interim are being murdered. The large dip in the crime rate, once attributed to this 'get-tough' policy, is slowly deteriorating, and the consequences of wholesale incarceration are being realized. Present correctional policies have eviscerated any chance at rehabilitation within the corrections system in the last ten years. Most of the policies that were used to foster positive change for inmates have been eliminated.

Some of the by-products of the thirty second solution for crime have been:

- gutting of work release programs, causing hardship to the offenders' families,
- decreased restitution to the victims of crime,
- lowering of child support payments,
- decreased family contact,
- diminished parenting by the offender,
- abolishing parole,

- decreasing substance abuse and anger management programs,
- eliminating reintegration programs (furloughs),
- eliminating most all educational programming, including college, vocational programs, and job-readiness programs.

One of the most important justifications for reintegration into society is that it offers offender hope, and with appropriate education, the opportunity to better themselves. Hope and a chance to change one's life are undeniably the most desirable outcomes of incarceration.

In a speech to the Maryland Legislature in 1952 entitled "The Mind of the Inmate," Dr. Robert Lindner addressed the negative effects of incarceration.

> *Inmates have to make a choice between a dream which will keep them sane and a reality which can drive them mad. It is a rare individual, indeed, who can walk out of those gates, past those same guards, a better person than when they came in. And, when they are successful in doing this, they accomplish it because of the fundamental inner resources they possess and the power of the mind, spirit and understanding they lay hold upon. We know they do it not because of the prison to which they have been subjected, along with therapy and the talk of rehabilitation, but rather and pointedly so in spite of it. But success or not, imprisonment will inflict scars upon a man's soul which will be borne for the rest of his days. Despite all our petty speech making, imprisonment is and always will be punishment for the people who have to undergo the experience. We can talk about deterrence and re-education, but retribution is what really is accomplished.*

Fifty years after his speech, Dr. Lindner's words still ring true. Even with our society's enlightened and caring orientation to human behavior, we have not changed our corrections system or the results. Currently, true re-education and rehabilitation within the corrections system in Massachusetts is virtually non-existent. Sadly, the criminal justice system offers little hope for a better life to the prisoners' families. In fact, we have rendered it harsher, with little or no hope to change the life of the incarcerated.

Imprisonment itself renders spouses and dependent children more vulnerable and at greater risk. The recidivism rate for offenders is often as high as eighty-two percent, and the community to which they return often improves the odds that an offender will again be incarcerated. The environment into which the offender re-enters is prone to further recidivism, increased violence and diminished unity.

Throughout the lives of many offenders, school has not been a positive experience. If access to education while incarcerated is denied, the offenders' self-fulfilling prophecy of continuing failure within the educational system is validated. Studies have shown that incarcerated individuals possess little self-esteem, which is further lowered by the harsh realities of minimal educational skills. The correctional educational system left in operation may actually aggravate the deterioration of an individual's self-confidence as a learner by providing inferior adult basic education programs, crowded classrooms, and few (if any) resources for remediation. In a culture that rewards bravado, how does a grown man or woman admit that he or she cannot read, write or perform basic math? How can one admit failure? Yet, ironically, the behaviors and excuses devised to hide the lack of formally learned skills are often complex, creative and indicative of a true capacity for learning.

Other common barriers to offenders' success as learners include:

- non-existent or poor reading skills,
- poor prior school attendance,
- addiction (drug/alcohol),
- financial problems and housing issues,
- mental health problems,
- physical and/or learning disabilities,
- lack of motivation and interest,
- absence of positive role model(s),
- distrust of teachers and the educational system,
- fear of rejection,
- feeling of inadequacy,
- physical and/or sexual abuse.

All of the above barriers to access for offenders can have a dilatory effect on future generations. For offenders who have children, the cycle of failure, low self-esteem, poor educational skills and lack of hope will be perpetuated. If we are truly willing to reduce the crime rate, we must make educating the offender a priority. If we do not make a sincere effort to educate offenders now, the offenders' children and their children's children will more than likely break the law.

A review of the literature within the corrections profession consistently points to the issue of access to services as the deciding factor in many successful programs. In a November 2000 periodical entitled *Comprehensive Responses to Youth at Risk: Interim Findings from the Safe Futures Initiative*, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention describes a number of programs and innovations that have worked to reduce violence, antisocial behavior, recidivism and further criminal behavior for juveniles throughout the country. The main thrust of programs that have succeeded is centered on one main theme: access for the offender. The most powerful process offering the ability for the offender to change is education. If we are to succeed in our efforts to reduce crime in this country, access to programs and inclusion in educational institutions must be offered at all levels.

Bunker Hill Community College is well positioned to provide access to quality programs and services for offenders, and has recently instituted two innovative offender-based programs. The first program establishes learning centers, to be housed in community correction programs. The learning center approach augments educational activities taking place in the day reporting center, enhances substance abuse treatment and offers technology instruction for the offender. Individualized testing and education plans are the framework for the offender to make educational and vocational choices. Additionally, each offender is given total access to the college. For most, this is the first time in their lives they have set foot in a college. This experience is powerful and can provide impetus to obtain further education. The second program is the federally funded Offender Reentry Program, which provides educational and vocational assessment, faith based mentoring, life skills training, job readiness training, job placement, tracking and offender access to education and training. This program, in which collaboration and caring are stressed, makes it possible for the community college to become a part of diverse community based collaboration. Faith-based organizations; job placement programs, social service agencies, criminal justice agencies and community-based programs are partners in this venture.

Some additional ways to improve access for offenders include:

Community-based Education: For the offender to achieve success, community ties and bonds need to be built. The role of education must expand from its traditional base in institutional settings to a more flexible, active function out in the community. Without this fundamental systemic change, educational

delivery systems are doomed to continued failure. Access to education for the offender must take place in a community setting as well as in the traditional classroom.

Flexibility: Flexibility in location, delivery and requirements is also critical to success in that it also accommodates the needs which the offender brings to the situation. The complex issues facing the offender could be broached if programming were adaptive to his or her needs. For example, female offenders have difficulty in obtaining childcare, thus curtailing their ability to attend traditional classes. As one alternative, joint parent and child reading programs would increase the value of education for both mother and child.

Training and Technical Assistance: Correctional education programs lack training for teachers, and corrections educators lack technical skills needed to offer access to the offender. Meager public funding and resources make it almost impossible for these programs to have the needed technology to offer programming that is relevant to this population. The higher education system possesses the expertise to aid in professional development opportunities for offender education program staff and the technical resources to aid in the transition to technology-based learning. Bunker Hill Community College has provided professional development opportunities and technological expertise to further the agenda for educational inclusion for the offender.

Program Implementation: Although the resources and the competence of community-based and faith-based programs to provide effective programs tend to be limited, they are the trend in re-uniting offenders with their communities. The role higher education can play is to offer different types of technical training to organizations that are less familiar with certain aspects of program implementation, such as accountability, record keeping, reporting, program evaluation and data base development.

Cultural Sensitivity: Educational programs must be specifically tailored to the target population. Cultural competencies are prerequisite to encouraging educational success. Currently, these aspects of educational programs are also lacking, leading to less access and increased rates of failure for the offender. Simply stated, this population lacks cultural pride and ethnic identity skills, and the present system does not offer the offender the means acquire them.

Assumption of Risk: Programs are reluctant to include high-risk offenders. This attitude automatically excludes a vast number of people who lack basic educational skills. This high-risk population poses unique challenges in the educational setting. Inclusion means all learners, not just a select group.

Communities can improve chances for offenders to lead healthy, productive crime-free lives by reducing economic and social privation and mitigating individual risk factors (e.g., poor family functions, academic failure) and promote the offender with the ability to bond to positive role models.

Replication of Success: Successful programs must be replicated. Success breeds success, thus increased access. The present system is territorial. Shared data and increased communication will create a system where educational access is championed.

Community Collaboration: Bringing together individuals from diverse institutions that do not normally interact will have the effect of reforming the system. Reform and mutual cooperation is needed if change is to happen. Education must end its bunker mentality and cooperate with parole, probation and other offender programs. Corrections, too, must leave the mentality of "us and them" behind, venture into the community, and collaborate with other community-based agencies. Offenders will have little access if these institutional changes do not take place.

Common Language: Before communication and trust among agencies can take place, a common language must be spoken. Different institutional cultures, climates, degrees of autonomy and flexibility, power, experience in corrections and levels of experience are all areas of concern in establishing collaborations. Commonality and the celebration of institutional diversity should be accented. The process of building relationships is lengthy and arduous, but the value of such alliances is immense, both for the collaborating institutions and, more importantly, for the offender. Mutual respect and a genuine concern to build a long-term, mature relationship must be emphasized from the outset. Such long-range achievements will benefit the community and society as a whole.

Innovation: Most communities are willing to adopt innovative educational programming in order to better make use of available resources and improve the quality of existing services. However, a problem often arises in implementing such efforts. There is an extended learning curve associated

with implementing new educational programs, and the difficulties associated with such programming can cause logistical problems which adversely affect the population of learners. Since access to education in this context can be directly impeded by problems associated with implementing the very innovations intended to broaden it, program planning must include adequate time and training to implement innovative approaches and technologies.

Risk Needs Assessment: One of the structures in which probability of at-risk individuals residing in a community can be predicted is the public school system. Relevant factors include early and persistent antisocial behavior in school, academic failure and a lack of commitment to education. Inadequate offender assessment by the correctional educational system leads to another education failure for the offender. These risk factors for the community can be decreased with adequate educational testing and better risk assessment tools which stress the significance of the educational system. These educational problems can be decreased with adequate level placement and success with remediation.

Conclusion

In the end, the "thirty second solution" to crime in America has generated yet more crime and created enormous obstacles to the successful reintegration of offenders into society. With all the barriers to access, how can an offender succeed at getting an education? If we do not break down these barriers, we will perpetuate the cycle of violence, prejudice, crime and hatred. We will continue to nurture generations of ignorance by denying generations of offenders and their families access to one of the tenets this country is founded upon: hope. Without changes in the services we offer offenders, the beacon of hope for millions of individuals will be permanently extinguished.

In My Own Time

Melanie Nguyen

When I arrived in this country in April 1993, I was already twenty-five years old. My parents had crossed the ocean looking for freedom and had been living in this country for almost ten years while I stayed in Vietnam with my grandparents. At first, I lived with my parents and two younger brothers in Springfield, a small town in North Carolina.

By that time, my parents could speak English as well as American people, but what surprised me the most was that they were eating American food and speaking English at home. They were working so many hours a day that all there was to eat in the house was "fast food," such as pizza and spaghetti with meatballs. It looked so strange to me that on my first day in America, I could not eat anything at all!

Before leaving my country, I had taken a few English classes at Cao Dang Su Pham, a community college in Vietnam. Because of this, I could read and write a little English, but I could not understand what everybody around me was saying. At home, I spoke Vietnamese with my parents, but I had to use body language to communicate with my two younger brothers, who chattered with each other almost entirely in English. Both of them understood and spoke just a little Vietnamese because they had left Vietnam at a very young age.

I remember vividly the time when my brothers were young. The younger boy was only five, and the older one was nine. Because both of my parents were working two jobs, it was up to me to take care of them after school. It

Acknowledgement: Special thanks to Jean Bernard and Shirley Cassarà, co-editors of *Teaching for Our Times*, who gave me the opportunity to write this essay. I also want to thank my professor, Alessandro Massaro, who sincerely and genuinely provided me with self-assurance in writing. I am also thankful to Professor Diane Rocheteau, who supported my mind positively in times of confusion.

was so embarrassing and difficult for me to talk to my brothers when my parents were not home. After a year, we were able to communicate better, as they learned some Vietnamese from me, and I continued to learn more English from them and their friends. In my culture, it can be humiliating to learn something from a younger sibling, so we found a way to get around it by inviting their English-speaking friends over. We hung around and watched TV, but I was also listening to them talk about the programs. Then I would go into my room and repeat whatever they said. Later on, I began to talk to them more easily. Now, after all these years, my brothers and I speak in a mixture of Vietnamese and English, but when I write to them, it must be in English, because this is the language they understand best.

Even before I came to this country, my big dream had always been to be a fashion designer; I believed this would make my parents proud of me. Because I was anxious to begin working toward my goal, I wanted to start my education the week after my arrival. Close to my house there was a small public school which had morning and evening classes. Most students went there to study as self-learning; at this school, instructors taught mathematics and guided students them to study grammar using computers. All of the programs available were for students who speak English as a native language. Therefore, when I started this program, it was terrible for me because I found that there was no level for a student like me, who came from another country and did not speak English very well. I was disappointed and left there after three days.

There were only two Vietnamese families in the whole town where I lived, and elder members of those families were the same age as my parents, so I didn't have any friends to talk with. I cried and became very upset. All I could do was always think about time in the past, about close friends that I had left in Vietnam. I remember spending our leisure time together; watching movies and eating at food vendors' stalls after school .

When I was still in high school in Vietnam, I thought that if my parents came to live permanently in any free country, after they became citizens that they would be legal to sponsor me to come over, then I would continue to go to school. I dreamed about the college I would attend in the future, about art schools and clothing designers, and having a nice family life. I used to be an active girl, but since the day I left that school in North Carolina, I became so quiet with tears always in my eyes.

After that, I applied for a job and worked in a small factory sewing clothes, the same as my mother's company. I don't remember that much about the date and time during those days. I had to work hard to earn money for a living, so I almost forgot about my dream.

Time passed, and one day my family and I came to visit my cousin in Boston and celebrated their wedding in July 1999. Boston is not a big city, but it attracted us because we realized that is not so hard to find a job here. Also, there are many Vietnamese markets in the city, which made it convenient for my parents to shop (even though they have lived here almost 15 years, their favorite food has always been Vietnamese), not like in Springfield where we used to live; if we wanted to eat Vietnamese food, that could take us about two or three hours by car to get to the market or the restaurant.

However, the most important reason was that we have a cousin and some friends who lived here, and unexpectedly, just a couple of weeks after I put an application; I had a job and decided to stay in Boston. About a year later, my parents sold the house in North Carolina; and we came together to live on South Broadway in Boston, Massachusetts.

More time has passed, and I am speaking and understanding English quite well now. Whenever I have free time, my favorite pastime at home is watching TV. Moreover, I watch the entire program, and continue to learn idiomatic language from it. I also practice listening while I watch movies and the news on TV; even if I don't understand all of the subtleties of language, I have learned ways to catch up easily. Watching movies helps me learn conversational ways to communicate in society, too.

I have an American friend who always helps me practice speaking. Soon after I met her, she noticed that my pronunciation was very good, and I caught things fast. One day, she told me, "If you go back to school, you will succeed." I just smiled and took that as a message encouraging me to step forward. Two weeks later, I decided to visit Bunker Hill Community College to see if it was the right place for me.

I came to BHCC because it has programs for students who study English as a Second Language. Then I could increase my background knowledge; to focus and reach an advanced level of study if I choose to stay here for two years college. There are many majors and programs that will help me to reach my dream. After I finish here, I can get a certificate or transfer to a four-year college...so I thought this would be a good place to start from.

Getting back into school has been the most exciting time in my life, and that has always been a big dream to complete my aspiration. There are no words to describe how happy I was on the first day I visited the campus. The first time I came here, in the fall of the year 2000, a couple of friends who had already completed their first year at BHCC accompanied me. When we got inside the school, we were given a tour to observe the place with which we would become well acquainted in the future. On the tour, I just saw a few students, because most of them were on vacation (the time between semesters), but I did learn about classrooms and about activities by looking at fliers and posters around the school. Then we went back to the enrollment counter, where we could register and get information to take a placement exam for the next semester. We got in line and made an appointment, then went home...waiting to take the exam.

It was difficult for me to go back to school because I had been out for a long time. My panic overtook me on my first day of college, but I urged myself to step forward. Now I have almost finished the ESL program, and I have good grades as well. The most important thing is that I do not hesitate any more. Now, I think if I try hard, that every door will open for me.

STAYING HERE

Adriene L. Anderson

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Beyond Access: Creating A Climate for Culturally Different Students

Adriene L. Anderson

Walking through the crowded hallways at Bunker Hill Community College at the start of a new semester, we witness a wonderful phenomenon — a dynamic and diverse student body moving about the campus. Among our students there is diversity in language, academic ability, race/ethnicity, culture, gender, and physical mobility. Almost every racial/ethnic group making up the population of this country is represented at the college in addition to students from more than seventy-five other countries. This phenomenon attests to the successful implementation of one of the institutional goals — to increase the diversity of the student population.

The transformation of the student population did not happen overnight but has been a steady and progressive endeavor. For example, in 1982, Bunker Hill Community College reportedly had a diverse racial/ethnic student population of approximately seven percent, which increased to about thirty-seven percent in 1989 and a little over forty-seven percent in 2000 (BHCC Institutional Research). Statistically, this is an impressive increase, which suggests that we have largely accomplished the diversity goal as it pertains to numbers of students. We may, however, be tempted to congratulate ourselves a little too soon for having achieved our diversity goal and to feel that we can now move on to something else.

Before we do so, let us consider the invisible or submerged barriers that are a present reality in our society and, as such, will directly or indirectly impact student interactions at BHCC. Our diversity initiative must continue for the following reasons:

- Access does not translate into equity.
- Prejudice and racism are often invisible, submerged and deeply entrenched in all of America's institutions and structures.

- Peoples' attitudes do not change quickly even when they are exposed to new knowledge (Allport 9).
- Stereotypes and stigma abound (as evident in Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein's *The Bell Curve*), and are resistant to correction because they are used as evaluative tools to support intellectual deficiency and/or inferiority of some groups (Allport 99, 191-192).

Because of the above-mentioned factors, culturally different students will still be confronted with obstacles such as "stereotypic attitudes, unfamiliar values, ineffective teaching methods, and an organization approach that may not support their efforts to succeed" (Smith 1) after they enter BHCC .

Because BHCC is an open admissions college, quantitative data can only tell us that an increased number of diverse student populations gained access and have chosen to matriculate at our institution. As Hurtado and her colleagues (19-20) correctly state, numbers cannot tell us what kinds of experiences students are having once they are admitted. If we are serious about diversity, it becomes necessary to move beyond the first level of access and assiduously work on creating and maintaining an institutional climate that respects and supports the full range of diversity in our college community.

Moving Beyond Access

We must be vigilant and pay increased attention to the impact of our institutional climate on culturally different students, who today comprise almost fifty percent of our student population. Many are recent newcomers and as such may be unprepared to navigate through the multiple systems of the institutional culture. We, therefore, have a responsibility to create a climate not only of access, but also of respect, inclusion, and support that evolves into a nest for positive learning outcomes.

In order to accomplish this task, we must both raise and expand the level of analysis by asking effective and critical questions that address the multiple dimensions of diversity and how they interact to either create a supportive or non-supportive institutional climate. Effective questions will enable us to create an agenda from which we can develop and implement action plans to ameliorate problems that surface from our investigation.

We must be serious about this next step and challenge ourselves to act decisively; a warm and supportive institutional climate is crucial to the

success of students who have historically been denied access to higher education. Our commitment cannot stop with access but should include an assessment of institutional factors that may impact students' educational experiences and, as a result, influence retention. The best way to accomplish this task is to conduct "customer satisfaction research" to provide immediate feedback from students on how they perceive the institutional climate.

To allow entrance and then think about climate only haphazardly speaks volumes about an institution's commitment to diversity. It conveys a subtle yet powerful message that we are not concerned about culturally different students after their enrollment. Furthermore, if we pay scant attention to environmental factors and how they impact students' well-being and educational achievement, we may very well be setting students up to fail.

These concerns are important and worth considering, especially since there has been a somewhat rapid increase in student diversity without a concomitant change in institutional personnel. Most of the faculty, staff and administrators are racially homogeneous, and although they may have longevity and tenure, some of them may be underprepared or unprepared to serve the influx of new students. They may continue to conduct business as though change has not taken place. This attitude can, and often does, have a profoundly negative effect on the overall institutional climate.

We often objectify and speak of the institution's climate as something outside of ourselves. We forget that we, as individuals, make up the institution and create its climate. While we bring our skills and talents to BHCC, we also bring our societal and cultural baggage (for example, our beliefs, prejudices, assumptions, attitudes about race). On a daily basis, we make students feel either welcome or unwelcome, supported or unsupported with our attitudes, beliefs and behaviors.

An example from our recent national history further illustrates this point. When James Meredith finally gained access to the University of Mississippi, he encountered a hostile climate (attitudes, beliefs and behaviors — verbal and non-verbal) that even the National Guard could not protect him from. Today, some students continue to face hostile climates in more subtle forms, including non-affirming behaviors and inadequate information and services. Though overtly hostile behaviors are no longer tolerated, these subtle attitudes and actions (or lack of them) are just as damaging. BHCC has made herculean efforts to welcome students and provide a warm and supportive climate. However, we still, by and large, do not know what kind of

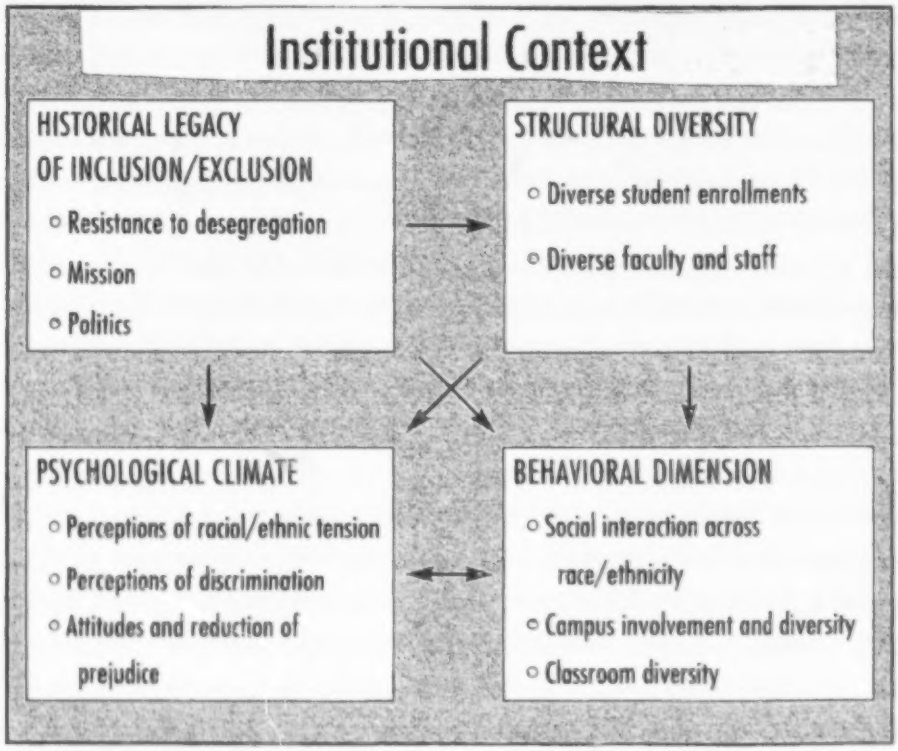
experiences culturally different students are having and how our institutional climate impacts those experiences.

In order to discern and gain an understanding of these experiences, we need to assess, measure, and compare them with our own perceptions. Next, we must act affirmatively to bridge incongruities so that we can continue to accomplish the twin goals of diversity and equity. Some ways that such understanding can be achieved include planning and implementing focus groups (with broad representation), student clubs (discussions, recommendations and action plans), and exit interviews.

Institutional Climate: A Broader Perspective

Before we continue further, let us define and expand what we mean by institutional climate, because it can be an amorphous and a difficult concept to grasp unless we can determine its boundaries. Hurtado and her colleagues have developed a four-dimensional model (Figure 1, below) that provides a helpful framework for our discussion.

Figure 1: Elements Influencing the Climate for Racial and Ethnic Diversity



Source: Hurtado et al, 1999

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The psychological dimension of climate is primarily concerned with "perceptions, stereotypes, racial/ethnic tension, perceptions of discrimination, attitudes and stigma" (25-28) which are prevalent and pervasive in the institution, but usually not talked about openly. Conversely, culturally different students are sometimes more willing to talk. They come to college with both positive and negative expectations, but most are positive that they will have a new learning experience, earn a college degree and transfer to a four-year college or university.

Negative expectations include the fact that they will encounter stereotypes, be stigmatized or labeled by teachers, staff and administrators, and will receive differential treatment at some point in their college careers. When students encounter prejudice, they expect the incident will be minimized, glossed over or avoided. When the college climate mirrors negative expectations, students are likely to become preoccupied with survival strategies rather than develop creative learning strategies that propel them toward achievement and graduation. If students have not developed sufficient coping strategies, or if they feel the school is not supportive, they will tend to drop out of school, thus supporting an incorrect and superficial analysis that culturally different students are not serious, and/or not college material.

Secondly, the structural dimension is primarily concerned with the "numerical representation of various racial, ethnic, and gender groups on campus. Research supports the notion that increasing an institution's structural diversity is considered the first important step in the process of improving the climate for diversity" (Hurtado 19).

The behavioral dimension is concerned with how students interact with "diverse peer groups," the extent to which they are involved in student government and student activities, classroom interactions, and their classroom experiences (37-54). It is in this dimension that action can be initiated for teaching and learning about ethnocentrism, race privilege, and cultural relativism. It also provides an ideal context for germinating ideas that build bridges across racial and ethnic differences in and out of the classroom.

One such effort that has crystallized at BHCC is the "Day of Dialogue." Every semester, the college community is invited to participate in discussions about race, ethnicity, power and race-related challenges. While this effort is to be applauded and serves as an impetus to create a more inclusive and

positive climate, a large number of culturally different students, especially those who encounter racism or discrimination inside and outside of the institution, do not attend. One plausible explanation for low attendance is that a one-day dialogue about race can be emotionally charged for people who have suffered systematic oppression while other people from the majority culture go about their business. This observation is supported by psychologist Na'im Akbar, who suggests that discussion about race "...preoccupies people unnecessarily and purposelessly with old hurts, tending old wounds" (v).

In additional to the Day of Dialogue, it might be helpful to initiate a student focus group that convenes periodically and prior to the first campus-wide event to discuss matters of race, thus providing an ongoing process. Another promising area that contributes to a positive climate at BHCC is Student Activities. During the weekly activity hour, student clubs frequently conduct activities that are inclusive, welcoming and bridge the gap across cultures.

Finally, the institutional dimension of climate is "concerned about the historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion, the resistance to desegregation, the institution's mission and the politics of the institution" (9-14). By understanding this dimension of climate and the multiple issues it contains, we can often dismiss simplistic explanations that seek to divert our attention from entrenched and submerged issues and cause us to focus instead on learning pathologies (remedial, developmental issues, underpreparedness and unpreparedness) as the salient issues. Unmasking internal and external politics allows us to gain a sense of how historical remnants may be adversely affecting the college climate and therefore may be acting in ways that are counterproductive to the college's present mission, goals, and objectives.

Hurtado's model provides an analytical tool to help us understand that diversity is multi-faceted and that its dimensions are interconnected. Therefore, it is important to the process of moving beyond access by bringing us into a greater awareness of how climate affects and impacts culturally different students' retention, persistence, graduation and transfer rates. Further, it provides a framework for asking effective questions about what happens after culturally different learners gain access to the college:

- What kinds of barriers, visible and invisible, are students likely to encounter that might stifle their creativity and erode their resolve to persist and realize their educational goals?

- What systems within the institution are likely to add to students' frustrations?
- What support systems are in place that promote advocacy, redress, reconciliation and prevent students from prematurely foreclosing on education?

These questions are of immediate importance if we are to continue to shift upward from pre-activity (recruiting, supporting inclusion) to proactivity (isolating dimensional factors that positively or negatively impact climate).

Conclusion

Finally, creating a climate at BHCC is fundamentally about creating equal education opportunity. It means remembering that the *Brown v. Board*[1] decision was about dismantling systems of injustice and inequality and continuing the commitment. Ashmore reminds us that "It (*Brown v. Board*) figures in our concept of justice and it colors our notion of equity. It nags at our consciousness and troubles our conscience" (29). He is profoundly correct in his observation. Therefore, creating climate is about "sensing" in order to be on time with solutions, listening to voices that have been silenced, and it is about becoming mindful of the comfort level of individuals and groups who have little or no experience in the college environment. It entails coming into an awareness of how interactions, language, policies and procedures are injurious to some and rewarding to others. Creating a climate is about developing and finding new ways and means of communicating the message that culturally different students are valued and supported at Bunker Hill Community College while simultaneously conveying the message that all forms of bigotry, prejudice and racism will not be tolerated. Most of all, creating a climate means challenging the status quo and shedding light on internal forces and "gate keeping" functions that have allowed access, but have tacitly or explicitly encouraged attrition.

Endnote

1 The landmark decision made by the Supreme Court in 1954 upheld the legal right of Linda Brown, a young African American student from Topeka, Kansas, to attend the nearby white school from which segregation laws had restricted her. Widely considered an overdue step in ending segregation in schools throughout the South, the case brought attention to a wide range of social and constitutional issues and effectively ended the "separate but equal" doctrine by affirming that separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.

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Toward a Meaningful Definition of Student Retention and Success at Bunker Hill Community College (or, Bad Things Happen in the First Two Semesters While a Funny Thing Happens on the Way to the Fourth)

David R. Massey

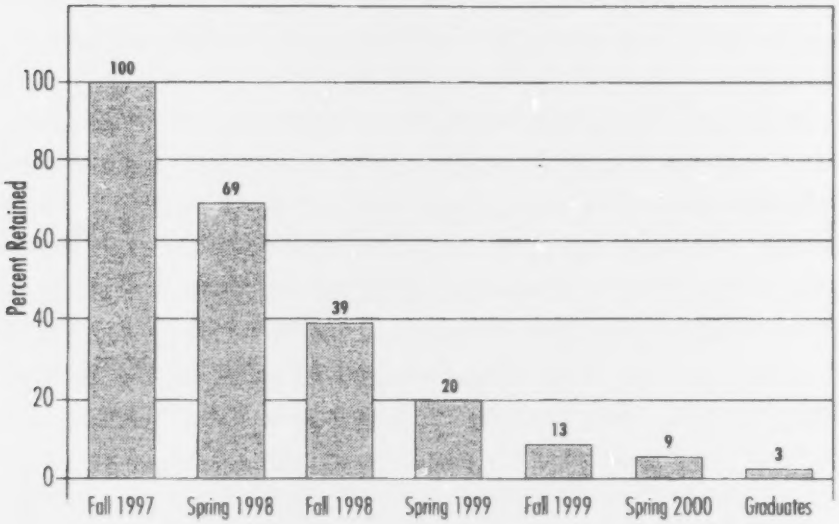
In the spring of 1998, the Director of Institutional Research at Bunker Hill Community College approached me to study the academic performance of a sample of students who had registered late.[1] Many faculty and staff believed that the fact that students registered late was an all-too -accurate predictor of their future academic failure, and that perhaps allowing students to register late was an exercise in futility. The initial goal of this study, therefore, was simply to determine if these students were more likely than other students to drop out after one semester.

During the late registration period of the Fall 1997 semester (from August 15 to the beginning of the semester), every fourth registrant had been flagged. This created a random sample of 137 late-registering students. My initial plan was to look at the academic performance and retention rates of these students over their first two semesters. I also looked at the demographics of the sample, however, and found that in terms of age, gender, and race it was a good representation of the entire student body. Given that this was such a good representative sample, I decided to broaden the study and follow these students for a longer period of time. The methodology for this longitudinal study was quite simple. At the beginning of each semester, I compared the cumulative grade point averages and course completion rates of those students who returned (persisters) and those who did not (non-persisters).[2]

I have now followed the sample through six semesters. As Figure 1 clearly shows, the sample numbers have dwindled substantially over the long run.

By the sixth (Spring 2000) semester, 124 our of the original sample of 137 had left BHCC before completing their programs of study.[3] Of the remaining

Figure 1: Retention/Completion Rates for a Sample of Students Entering Fall 1997



thirteen, ten students were still enrolled at BHCC and three students had completed their programs and graduated. This gave us a combined retention/completion rate of nine percent through six semesters.

In comparing the academic records of those who persisted and those who dropped out on a semester-by-semester basis, there were some interesting findings:

- Through the first three semesters, the retention rate for the sample of late registrants was a little better than that for the student population as a whole.
- The vast majority of students who left BHCC after either their first or second semester were failing academically.
- In contrast, nearly one half of the students who left after either their third or fourth semester were performing well academically. In fact, on average, those students who did not return after their fourth semester were doing better academically than the students who returned.

Each of these findings is discussed in more detail below.

Semester I to Semester II: Good News and Bad News

There were two significant findings from this part of the study. First, the good news: the retention rate of the late registering students through the second semester, although not great, was actually a bit higher than that of the BHCC student population as a whole (69% versus 61% for the population

as a whole). This finding seems to contradict the idea that late registration is largely a wasted effort. Procrastination, at least in this case, did not seem to portend lesser academic performance. This finding lends support to those people who feel that it is worthwhile to allow students to register right up to the beginning of the semester.

The bad news is that the vast majority of the 31% of students who dropped out after one semester were failing academically. The average GPA of those not returning after the first semester was an abysmal — .97 versus 2.42 for those returning.

A comparison of course completion rates for returning and non-returning students revealed a similar disparity: an average 31% completion rate for those not returning versus 70% for those returning. In fact about half of those who did not return for a second semester (47%) had failed to earn any academic credits at all during their first semester at BHCC. The pattern seemed clear. Those students who did well academically persisted; those who did poorly did not.

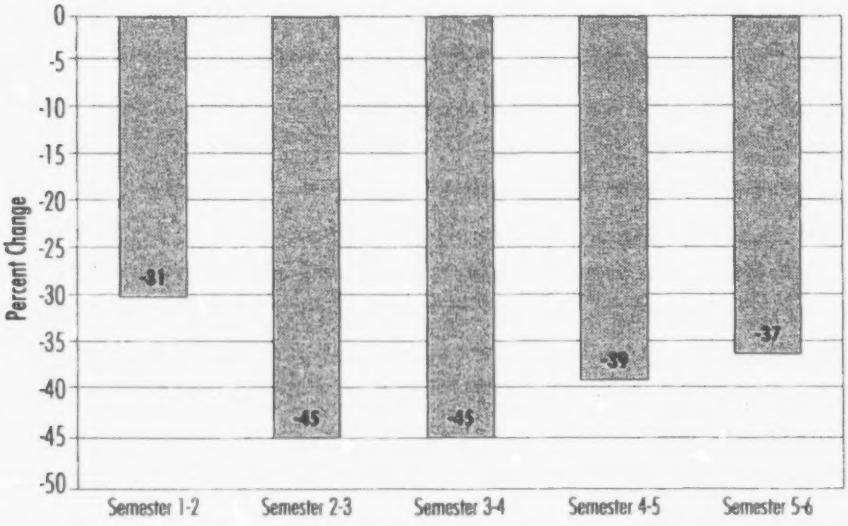
Semester II to Semester III

The same pattern continued to hold between the second and third semesters. Unfortunately, instead of getting into the swing of community college life and improving academically as we might expect, many of the students who made it to the second semester faltered badly. Investigation of the transcripts of the students in the sample who made it to the second semester revealed that their average GPA and course completion rates fell significantly from the first to second semester. Their average GPA fell from 2.42 to 1.81 while their course completion rate plunged from 70 to 52%.

In light of this overall drop in achievement, it is not surprising that the percentage drop in enrollment for the sample was even larger between the second and third semesters than between the first and second. As shown in Figure 2, 45% of the students who enrolled in semester two did not return for a third semester.

Those who did not return had significantly lower GPAs (0.95 versus 2.49) than those who returned for a third semester. In other words, the pattern of academic failure and non-persistence established between semesters one and two continued between semesters two and three.

Figure 2: Semester to Semester Loss in Enrollment



Semester III to Semester IV: A New Pattern Emerges

By the third semester, sixty-two percent of the original sample had disappeared. In other words, six out of ten of the students who had registered in Fall 1997 were gone by Fall 1998.

(As bad as this figure sounds, it is fully consistent with the figure of 61% that the Director of Institutional Research arrived at for the BHCC student population as a whole.)[4]

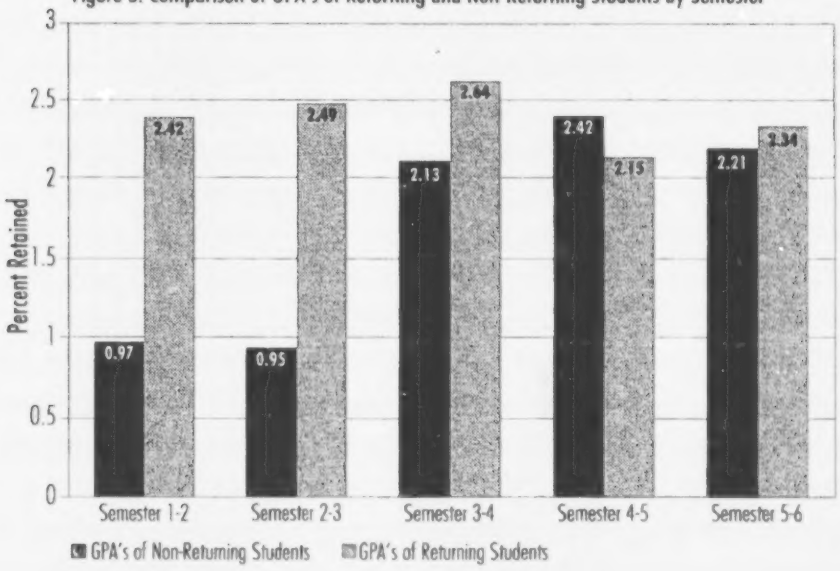
For those students who made it to the third semester, however, a new pattern of persistence seemed to emerge. In terms of academic performance, overall performance rates went up. For the first time, the average GPA rose above the 2.0 or "C" level. Perhaps more interesting was the fact that the differences between persisters and non-persisters began to shrink. The average GPA of those students who left after their third semester was a respectable 2.13 — a full grade point above that of the students leaving after the first and second semesters. Similarly, while the students who left after the second semester on average were earning less than half of the credits they were attempting, the students who left after their third semester were on average completing seventy-six percent of their courses.

Moreover, while persisters still had a higher average GPA than non-persisters (2.64 versus 2.13), the gap in GPA between persisters and non-persisters had narrowed substantially — from a 1.5 point difference the

previous semester to just a .5 grade difference. (See Figure 3 for a comparison of the GPAs of persisters and non-persisters for each semester.)

Despite these improvements in academic performance, however, students

Figure 3: Comparison of GPA's of Returning and Non-Returning Students by Semester



were still leaving in large numbers. Forty five percent of the students enrolled in semester three failed to return for semester four. In sum, even though students were performing significantly better academically, they were still leaving in large numbers.

Semester IV to Semester V

This new pattern deepened after the 4th semester. For the first time, the average GPA of persisters (2.15) was actually lower than that of non-persisters, 2.42 (Figure 3). A similar inversion took place in course completion rates: 82% for non-persisters versus 80% for persisters. A closer look at the ten students who failed to return after their fourth semester revealed that three of them were failing, not necessarily a good reason for quitting but at least a logical one. The other seven, however, had fourth semester GPAs of 2.5 or better with an average of 3.25. In comparison to the pitiful transcripts I was accustomed to looking at, these students' good grades fairly jumped off the screen at me. Remember, these were the students who were not returning. Unlike the students who were leaving earlier, these students clearly were getting into the swing of academic life at BHCC and

thriving. Whereas before it seemed safe to infer that students were leaving because they were failing academically, this clearly was no longer the case. Why were these students leaving?

A Qualitative Look

In order to get a better idea of why these high performing third and fourth semester students were not returning to BHCC, my colleague, Alice Kellogg, contacted several of them by phone. The results, although by no means conclusive due to the small sample, were instructive. First of all, the students were very pleased with their educational experience at BHCC.

In response to the question, "Did you achieve your academic goals at Bunker Hill?"

"Absolutely," said one. "BHCC was very helpful." said another.

Why did they leave before they had finished their degrees? In several cases, it was because they had moved away from Boston. In other cases, they were ready to move on to four-year schools. "I applied to one of the best art schools in the country and was accepted," reported one of the respondents.

Clearly, students are aware that you do not need an associate degree to transfer to a four-year school. Unfortunately, BHCC has no current figures on early transfers. The transfer counselor at the college estimates that two years ago, when the last transfer study was done, more than half of the students transferring did so before receiving their degree.[5]

In sum, the students that we were able to reach were generally pleased with their accomplishments at BHCC and were either ready or forced by personal circumstances to move on.

Implications for Defining Retention and Student Success at BHCC.

The results of this study lend support to the contention that the usual measures of educational success, such as graduation rates and raw retention rates, are not appropriate for community colleges. While it is true that nearly all of our students indicate upon admission that their goal is to obtain a certificate or associate degree, this study indicates that by their third or fourth semester, a good number of our best students feel that they have achieved their goals at BHCC and are ready to move on.

The figures suggest that in contrast to the students who leave after their first or second semester (most of whom are failing academically), a majority of the students who depart after their third and fourth semesters are, in fact, succeeding academically. The small follow-up survey we carried out further

suggests that these students considered their BHCC careers as successful and were quite satisfied with their academic accomplishments at the college. They were not so much dropping out as moving on.

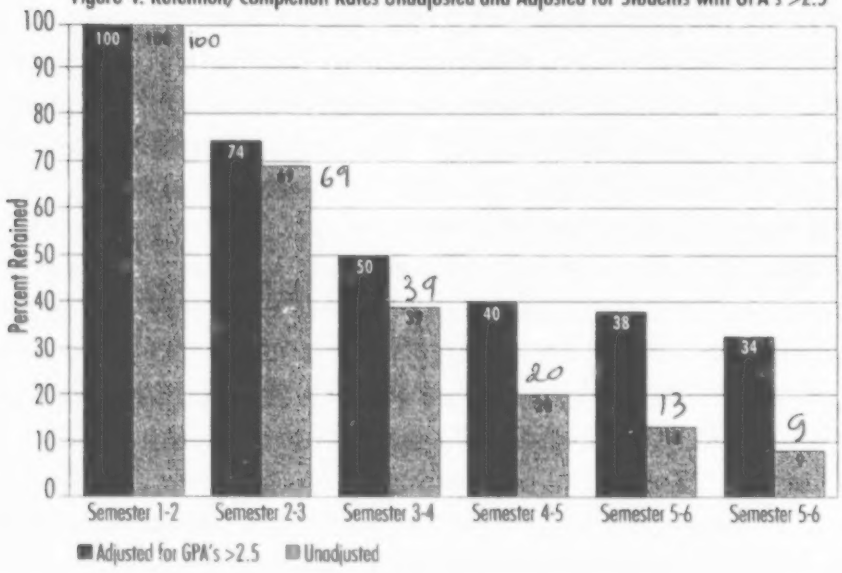
I would suggest that any meaningful measure of retention or completion rates at a community college should take into consideration students' academic standing at the time of their leaving. Of course, it would be nice if we could systematically survey students who leave BHCC before graduation to find out if they have achieved their academic goals. Unfortunately, this is impractical since we really have no way of knowing students are leaving until they are gone, at which point it becomes difficult to locate them, let alone survey them.

On the basis of this admittedly small study, I would recommend consideration of the adoption of a model of retention that posits academic success as a positive outcome, *even if students leave the school before they complete their degree requirements.* With such a model, for example, only students with GPAs below a certain level, say 2.5, at the time of their leaving, would be counted as drop-outs. Students who leave with GPAs above this level would be counted as having successfully completed their community college careers. To illustrate the effect of such a model, I have adjusted the retention/completion rates in our small study to fit this definition.

Figure 4 (next page) shows a comparison of retention rates for our sample calculated before and after such an adjustment. We can take the sixth semester figures in the last column as an example. According to the graph, the adjusted rate is thirty-four percent versus an unadjusted rate of nine percent. The way these figures were calculated is as follows: by their sixth semester, 124 of the original 137 students had left before completing their programs of study. Three students had graduated, and ten students were still enrolled. The *un*adjusted retention/completion figure is the sum of these latter two groups (thirteen) as a percentage of the total (137), or nine percent.

Thirty-three of the 124 our students who had left without finishing their programs had GPAs greater than 2.5. The *adjusted* figure was arrived at by simply reclassifying these 33 students as "successful leavers," and adding this figure to the 13 who had graduated or were still enrolled. The adjusted retention/completion rate therefore is this new figure (46) as a percentage of the total (137), or thirty-four percent. The rates were adjusted in the same manner for each semester.

Figure 4. Retention/Completion Rates Unadjusted and Adjusted for Students with GPA's >2.5



There are two noteworthy things about Figure 4:

1. There is little difference between the adjusted and unadjusted retention rates for the second and third semesters, since most of the students who were leaving were failing academically and had GPA's less than 2.5.
2. The adjusted and unadjusted figures for the fourth, fifth, and sixth semesters differ significantly, since many of the students leaving at these times were performing well academically. By the fifth semester, for example, the adjusted retention rate is nearly triple the unadjusted rate, 38% versus 13%. This large adjustment is due to the fact that 70% of the school leavers between the fourth and fifth semesters had GPA's greater than 2.5.

A cynic might think that this is simply an attempt to make the college look better. In fact, it is not. Rather, it is an attempt at finding a better, more meaningful, yet efficient method of defining and calculating rates of retention and school success for an urban community college.

Conclusion

This study gives us a series of snapshots of the academic performance of a cohort of Bunker Hill Community College students updated on a semester-by-semester basis. It suggests that the overall retention rate for our students is

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extremely low, with well over half of our students leaving before their third semester. This is a lamentable record and bears further investigation and remediation.

The study also suggests that many of the students who leave after their *third, fourth, or fifth semesters*, by contrast, are doing well academically. Interviews with some of the students who left with good academic records revealed that they had fulfilled their goals and were moving on to other things. This suggests the need for a more nuanced definition of success/retention than that given by raw retention and graduation rates. Given the logistical problems involved in doing follow-up studies on a very mobile student body and the limited resources available for community colleges to do research, there is a need for an efficient yet accurate alternative method of determining retention/success rates. One such quick, but not too dirty, method is suggested and demonstrated here. Namely, students who leave with GPAs above a certain level are counted as successful students. Such a method produces substantially different and hopefully more meaningful statistics.

With more detailed research on when and why students leave community colleges, such a model could be refined. For example, the GPA cutoff level could be easily adjusted either up or down, or a minimum course completion rate could be added to the definition of success. The important thing is that the method be easy to implement and reflect the reality of community college students' lives. Clearly, we need to do more systematic follow-up on our students after they have left the college to ascertain why they have left, what they feel they accomplished at BHCC, and what they feel are the college's areas of strength. Only then, can we confidently arrive at meaningful definitions of retention and student success.

Endnotes

1 This study began as a part of my sabbatical leave project during the spring 1998 semester. My thanks to Mark Rotondo, former Director of Institutional Research, and Alyce Curtis, former Director of Advising, Counseling and Retention, who selected the sample and first suggested that I work on this project.

2 The course completion rate was calculated simply as credits earned as a percentage of credits attempted. According to the BHCC Catalog, "A course is not considered completed if a student receives a grade of F, NA, W, WA, or IP."

[3] The tracking of this sample was complicated by the college's switch in computer systems in 1999. Two student records disappeared somewhere into cyberspace early in the study. They were removed from the study. By the fifth semester (Fall 1999) the number of students left in the sample was getting precariously small. From 137 students, the sample had dwindled to 17 – not really a sufficient number for meaningful comparative analysis between leavers and persisters. I do plan to continue to gather data, however, in order to arrive at a graduation rate for the entire sample.

[4] Mark Rotondo, former Director of Institutional Research, personal communication, April 1998.

[5] Jimmie Roberts, Office of Admissions and Transfer Counseling, personal communication, November 2000.

[6] This may change somewhat since there are now transfer compacts in place with the Massachusetts state colleges and universities and with a number of private colleges. These agreements provide financial aid advantages and simplified admission procedures to students who finish their degree programs before transferring.

Psychological Factors in Second Language Aquisition: Why Your International Students are *Sudando La Gota Gorda* (Sweating Buckets)

Sandra Clyne

Why is it so difficult and emotionally trying for adults to acquire a second language? What makes our international and newly arrived immigrant students sprout gray hairs and frown lines when they try to learn a *lingua franca* like English that could pave their road to academic and career success? At Bunker Hill Community College, where second language speakers often make up the majority of a class, what types of classroom management and teaching practices can be used to promote the development of students' second language communication skills?

Linguists have often pointed out that children in every culture all over the world manage to achieve communicative competence in their "first" or "native" languages — unless they have a specific language processing problem like autism or have been restricted to a developmental environment markedly deficient in language stimuli. After years of working with the language(s) in use within the home and immediate community, children become increasingly more fluent and effective in their command of the native tongue.

Subsequent work within a school setting with a more abstract or decontextualized use of the native language — and with the addition of written as well as oral use of language — further strengthens the child's communicative competence. It might at first glance seem logical that an academically well-prepared adolescent or adult who makes a "second" language an object of serious study could likewise achieve proficiency in that language without undue stress or emotional turmoil. But as any educator of new learners of English will attest, a smooth and seamless course is rarely the pattern for second language acquisition within a college setting.

There are, of course, enormous cognitive differences between young adults and developing children, which could account for *some* of the difficulties

college students encounter in mastering a second language. Linguists and educators like Eric Lenneberg and Derek Bickerton subscribe to the view that there is a biological timetable for optimal language learning which stymies the efforts of adolescents and young adults to acquire language. Theoreticians like Judith Strozer have applied this line of reasoning to second language acquisition and would predict a more difficult course for second language acquisition in adolescents and adults, as compared to children, due to differences in brain plasticity.

An opposing pack of linguists downplay the role of the biological clock in second language learning. Most notably, Catherine Snow and M. Hoefnagel-Hohle have argued that adolescents, if studied systematically, actually can be shown to be the fastest language learners in all areas except pronunciation, with adults following and school-age children bringing up the rear (337-343). A possible explanation is that adolescents and adults can make use of their better developed abilities for abstract logical reasoning (what Piaget would term "formal operations") to achieve an analytical understanding of the new language being studied, while children can only reason about language in relatively concrete terms. Adolescents can add a child-like willingness to experiment and play with language to this capacity for metalinguistic awareness, and so they become the speediest second language learners.

Regardless of which view of the "biological timetable" issue seems more compelling to the educator, it is virtually beyond dispute that certain cognitive factors such as verbal intelligence, phonological processing ability, and long-term memory capacity strongly influence the student's ability to learn a second language (Rubin 42). However, there are important facilitating factors as well as roadblocks to second language learning that have little to do with cognition or capacity for conceptual understanding.

Second language acquisition researcher Stephen Krashen developed the construct of an affective filter, consisting of the variables of anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence. According to Krashen, these psychological variables may strongly enhance or inhibit second language acquisition by playing a critical mediating role between the linguistic input available in the educational setting and the student's ability to learn (30-32). In order for students to fully engage their innate capacity to acquire language within an input-rich environment, they should ideally be relaxed, motivated, and self-confident. Unfortunately, however, this rosy picture is far from typical in the case of the new learner of English, who may often feel anxious, discouraged,

and embarrassed within the classroom setting. A variety of second language acquisition researchers have sketched out the dynamics of this malaise that so impedes second language learning.

Alexander Guiora, whose research focuses on personality factors in second language acquisition, holds that "...second language learning in all of its aspects demands that the individual, to a certain extent, take on a new identity" (145). Since an individual's identity is developed within a context of communication and interaction — for example, with family members and peers — and since language plays a salient role in interpersonal relations, language becomes central to the sense of self. Changing that basic sense of who you are can be difficult, to say the least, particularly where the individual's sense of self-efficacy or confidence in her or his key abilities is challenged in the process.

Competence in communicating with others is just such a key ability central to the individual's self esteem. Facing that stripping away of language competence which occurs when we try to communicate in a second language requires tremendous ego strength, an ability to retain a sense of self esteem even when exposing and exploring an area of real weakness. For these reasons, bolstering the student's sense of self-esteem is the key to working with new learners of English in the college context.

Second language acquisition researcher John Schumann explores the concept of "language shock," a fear of appearing comical or making a fool of oneself when attempting to communicate in a second language (382). The student's desire to avoid narcissistic injury, in combination with his or her social inhibitions and fear of criticism, may function to decrease his or her motivation to learn English as a second language and to master course content expressed in English. The anxiety and disorientation that the international student or the immigrant faces in entering a new culture, which Schumann terms "culture shock," can further complicate the learning process for these students. If we notice that a student acquiring English is reticent to speak up in class discussions or displays a writing style that is somewhat terse or parrot-like, we need to be aware of the possibility that the student is facing the frustrations of language and culture shock. These students need to be helped to become full participants in the educational process that is taking place in the classroom, rather than acquiesce and become passive audience members. Again, bolstering students' self-esteem by showing a willingness to work non-judgmentally to help them develop

better communicative capacities in English could help increase their motivation and achievement.

Finally, in considering the range of psychological variables which may either facilitate or inhibit the efforts of new learners of English, we should not overlook the issue of power. English may well be perceived by the international student as the language of a rich and powerful post-industrial society, while the native language may be seen as somehow less impressive and respected. This perceived differential between the power and respectability of the native language and that of English could be expected to aggravate the psychological difficulties which interfere with language learning: anxiety, low self-esteem and motivation, identity conflict, language shock and culture shock.

As one way of easing the newly arrived immigrant or international student's conflictual identification with the English language and American culture, these issues could be explicitly addressed by incorporating them into the class curriculum. The opportunity to design classroom activities (such as student presentations and culture circles) which address issues of acculturation and invite valuing and sharing of personal experience — as well as use of native language — would seem particularly fitted to course areas like behavioral science, social science and literature, as well as English as a Second Language.

Within this context, I would like to suggest Jim Cummins' reciprocal interaction model of education, which sees a network of meaningful oral and written communication among students and teachers as the matrix of learning. Student-directed projects, presentations and classroom discussions supplement and even begin to supplant the traditional lecture format. In this way, validation of minority students' cultural experiences becomes a powerful tool for actively involving new speakers of English in the learning experiences happening within the classroom. According to Cummins, "This clearly implies that minority students' first language (L_1) should be valued within the classroom and its development encouraged" (34). This attitude stands in opposition to the traditional "English-only" approach to working with international students and other non-native speakers of English in the classroom.

"Transmission" models of pedagogy, Cummins explains, exclude and suppress the students' experiences from the classroom in the interest of

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establishing a one-way flow of information from the teacher to the students. In this too-familiar pedagogical approach, the teacher passively transmits, the students passively receive and the school authorities wield exclusive control of the learning process while minimizing the participatory involvement of students. The most basic function of language, meaningful communication, tends to get lost in the shuffle — a dynamic which inhibits language learning. Interactive or experiential pedagogy, by contrast, would seek to incorporate the students' expression of cultural and language experiences in the classroom in order to validate students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds as well as to stimulate their active participation in classroom learning. The challenge for community college educators is to find ways of inviting and structuring such participation within the learning community so that both second language students and native speakers achieve the fullest possible benefits.

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Beyond the Open Gate: Influences on Student Success

Cynthia A. Bioteau

"All she thought about the key was that if it was the key to the closed garden, and she could find out where the door was, she could perhaps open it and see what was inside the walls...The ivy was the baffling thing. Howsoever carefully she looked she could see nothing but thickly-growing, glossy, dark green leaves...Thick as the ivy hung, it nearly all was a loose and swinging curtain...she put her hand in her pocket, drew out the key and found it fitted the keyhole. She held back the swinging curtain of ivy and pushed back the door which opened slowly — slowly..she was standing inside the secret garden."

– from *The Secret Garden*
Frances Hodgson Burnett, 1911

As we speak of access to higher education and, more specifically, to the community college experience, the implication is that an "open-door" policy grants access to any who wish to enter. Throughout the last three decades, community colleges have evolved to provide gateways to higher education by becoming economically and geographically accessible to people from all segments of society. Federal financial aid programs have been put in place to subsidize the costs for low and middle-income students, breaking the financial barrier to college attendance. Liberal admissions requirements have provided opportunities for the academically weak and strong to gather together in a community college setting. Developmental or pre-college preparation courses now provide access to those who are academically underprepared.

However, these components address getting the student to the door of the college experience. It would appear timely for the conversation around access to draw back the curtain of ivy and open the door to higher education,

so that all who enter may end up successfully reaching their educational goals. That it currently appears a secret garden for many does not mean it must stay this way; for we, as educators, must begin to scratch the surface of our teaching styles, curriculum design, and assessment techniques to encourage the growth of the diverse needs, experiences, cultures, and learning styles of all students who pass through our doors. Indeed, understanding college access and success has much to do with acknowledging the importance of knowledge as a social construct, taking into account the multicultural effects of norms, values, expectations, and connections between knowledge and power.

In *A Pedagogy of Hope*, Paulo Freire explained, "the phenomenon of life (cannot) be understood apart from its historico-social, cultural, and political framework...the reading and writing of words comes by the reading of the world" (78). And so it is, as we extend the conversation concerning access to teaching and learning within the community college, that we must consider the world beyond our walls as well as its various representations within. How I teach and what I learn in the process, as well as how I learn and what I teach in the process, is firmly rooted in my own personal cultural experiences. My past determines how I read the world from where I stand at this moment in place, space, and time. Freire further suggested that knowledge is socially constructed in the negotiation of experience with other knowers, thereby creating "the wisdom that necessarily results from sociocultural experiences" (84).

As educators, we become facilitators of knowledge for all who enter the college. As facilitators, we do not expect our students to master someone else's meaning, but rather to enter into the learning with their own personal dreams, histories, cultural perspectives and lessons to share. This approach suggests that the community college be seen and studied as both an instructional and cultural site. In teaching literacy — the reading and writing of the word through each student's reading of the world — we can honor the cultural experiences that have constructed the framework of understanding.

It is within this framework that "college access" can be understood in broader terms. For example, it can guide the way we help students approach the acquisition of study skills to enhance success within the college experience. Time management, often taught with only the emphasis of segmenting all aspects of life around completing assignments, valuing time and deadlines above all else, might also take into account the tremendous

cultural variables that affect how one views the importance — or not — of time and the meeting of external deadlines. Bringing students into the conversation with a "culture circle" as an initial learning activity can set the stage for the sharing of cultural values as they pertain to time, assumptions (implicit and explicit), and an agreement of acceptable parameters within the class.

A culture circle is just as it suggests — an activity that situates students in a circular fashion and invites discussion around a common theme from which each student shares his or her own personal cultural perspective. The theme identifies a common activity such as food preparation, celebrations, family gatherings, etc. from which each student, regardless of a specific culture, has an experience to draw upon and share within the circle. The conversation often points out similarities and differences, as well as unspoken assumptions of how each member of the circle perceives such culturally based concepts as the value of time, differentiation of social roles, and the importance of family obligations. This, then, becomes the foundation upon which to build learning skills necessary for contributing to the success of each member of the group.

Another area essential in this reconstruction of college level access is that of the teacher as powerful owner of information vs. the teacher as nurturer of new ideas. This rearrangement of the locus of control in the learning environment requires much work on the part of not only the teacher, but also the students. Sharing responsibility for the learning activities that take place within a classroom broadens the meaning of access to include contributing, constructing, and creating new knowledge by all members of the group. It concurrently supports the inclusion of individual experiences by providing ownership of the teaching and learning process. Investment in the creation of knowledge contributes greatly to the success of accessing education as a meaningful and personal experience. As educators and facilitators of this kind of knowledge construction, we can influence learners in subtle and deliberate ways, so that our students may find themselves going beyond the philosophical gate of open access and entering into personally created and invested learning experiences.

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TRANSFORMATION THROUGH LEARNING

Charles A. Shairs

Stephen E. Slaner

Access, Empowerment and New Ways of Learning at a Distance

Charles A. Shairs

In the fourth grade at Saint Mary's Elementary school in Beverly some years ago, I recall watching television with twenty other classmates. (The exact year will remain undisclosed for reasons I am sure the reader will understand.) The TV was tuned to the Catholic Archdiocesan Television Network. The program we were watching consisted of a nun, attired in the traditional habit of the Sisters of Notre Dame, repeating and repeating words and phrases critical to our understanding of the French language. I remember it aired three times a week, somewhere near lunchtime.

Our facilitator on-site, Sister Rose of the Angels, S. N. D., made certain we responded, when prompted, with appropriate enthusiasm. She particularly emphasized voice inflection, linguistic gymnastics involving the tongue and lips and seemed to possess a devout reverence for rote memorization. I survived the experience, as did my classmates. Whether we collectively (or individually) loved, hated or remained indifferent to the experience was never an issue. It was simply another way to learn.

So began my involvement with distance education. I guess it found me then, and later, it would find me again — but the landscape changed in the intervening years.

A Confluence of Factors, Historically Speaking

Bunker Hill Community College has a long tradition of educational rigor and scholarship, embracing instructional innovation and adapting appropriate technologies to deliver higher education to new constituents. Historically, the institution has taken risks, tried new approaches, refined them and tried again, dreamt when appropriate or practical and seldom, if ever, been impeded by the fear of failure.

Within this context, the college embarked upon live, fully interactive, multi-point televised instruction to four Boston high schools in 1989, funded as a pilot demonstration project by New England Telephone using fiber-optic technologies. Prior to this time, BHCC had assumed a leadership role in developing correspondence courses and broadcast telecourses as a means of reaching students at a distance, so there existed a precedent both philosophically and in practice.

In this new endeavor, the plan called for offering advanced placement college credit courses to students at Charlestown, Hyde Park, Snowden International and Brighton High Schools in real time, the key (new wrinkle) being total interactivity among all sites — something New England Telephone called 'continuous presence.' The interactive nature of the effort would serve to mitigate the feeling of detachment and that sense of unilateral, one-way-signal-sending of the omnipotent and ubiquitous medium called television.

Best of all, students would receive instruction that would have never been possible otherwise. They would get it from a familiar, local institution. The idea constituted a promising example of technology contributing an educational and social service to an under-served population. Calculus, Japanese, personal finance and criminal justice courses were prepared and presented using this medium and the students learned. But this "trial" that was expected to run for two years, lasted for more than six. And in that time, changes in technology accelerated, video compression algorithms developed rapidly, and personal computers connected to the Internet became practically ubiquitous. The convergence of technologies, particularly television and computer, had arrived.

During the mid to late nineties, the Boston Public Schools could not justify the expense of participating in the network that the telephone company had demonstrated. Though several attempts to secure grant funding were made, the initiative was not able to muster sufficient local support to continue. Concurrently, other colleges requested more information and were invited to meetings and demonstrations at BHCC. The goal of these meetings was to enlist partners and discuss the efficacy of a distance education consortium among public higher education entities.

We met. And we met. And we met — and it seems we mostly decided to meet again.

I believe it was throughout this process (it probably lasted three years) that Dean Bill Sakamoto and I slowly, yet profoundly, began to appreciate the many things that set our institution apart from all of the others. We took risks, fully aware that determination, vision and hard work were our primary assets in delivering on the mission of providing greater access and opportunity to students.

One day, a phone call from Dr. Margaret McDevitt from the University of Massachusetts at Lowell's College of Education/Center for Field Studies came to one of our offices. She inquired about our high school initiatives, our wins and losses, methodologies and our desire to discuss possible areas of collaboration with the university. The Dean of the Graduate School of Education, Donald Pierson, joined the conversation shortly thereafter. Within a few months, MassCODE, the Massachusetts Consortium for Distance Education, was born.

Soon, the new collaborative consisted of five colleges: BHCC, UMass/Lowell, North Shore, Northern Essex and Middlesex Community Colleges. The consortium offered the colleges the opportunity to share instruction, reach new audiences, collaborate in professional development and most importantly, cooperate. Evaporating geographic boundaries, a result of mobility and technology, made physical location a less important factor than it had been in the past. The notion that a college's "service area" was sacrosanct was being re-examined.

Monthly MassCODE meetings not only dealt with administrative and programming issues, but as an informal forum for issues relating to distance education. The general discussion frequently touched on ways of incorporating Internet components into instruction, with particular reference to the initiative at UMass/Lowell.

Our service provider, now known as Verizon, provided the consortium a location and funding to train faculty from the several colleges in the best strategies using interactive television. At Verizon's corporate training facility in Marlborough, eight faculty from each college participated in three days of training to teach at a distance using various technologies. Anecdotally, many participants insisted that their traditional instruction would benefit from the experience; they saw themselves and their peers discover new ways of presenting and preparing instruction. Indeed, lack of preparation when trying to teach using television was painfully apparent and often amusing.

Preparation would figure prominently later on as course migration to the Internet became a reality.

Alphabet Soup: An RFP to BHE under CPIP

On August 6, 1998, President Mary Fifield signed a grant application to the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education in response to an RFP for the Campus Performance Improvement Program. The application sought $176,500 to "strengthen and enhance these (distance learning) delivery systems in order to serve a larger audience of non-traditional students". In late October, the college was awarded $160,000 to pilot six courses for the Spring, 1999 semester.

In three months, the challenge was to purchase appropriate software, gather specifications and purchase a Web server, rebuild the college's Web site, customize the software template, enlist and train faculty to develop courses, recruit students and be certain it all worked by January 21.

The response from faculty and staff in contributing to the effort made it all possible. The Criminal Justice and Computer Science departments worked feverishly to develop and populate the server with coursework. Part-time student interns helped rebuild the Web site and customize the software while the Academic Computing staff installed, tested and configured the software.

And, on January 21, it worked.

That first semester became a laboratory for success and less-than-success in online learning and pointed to many things we needed to improve. It also validated much we had aspired to and believed in.

Interest and enthusiasm for delivering instruction via the Web has remained high. President Fifield, in creating BHCC's eCollege a year ago, underscored her support for the effort. In two years' time, the eCollege has developed forty courses, three full degree programs are available and hybrid courses (courses that meet in a traditional setting half the time and use web instruction the other half) are being offered for the first time in Fall of 2001.

The roles and responsibilities that eCollege support staff, Therese Pullum and Timothy Lambert, have shouldered in advancing and supporting these efforts cannot be overstated. Therese creates students' electronic accounts, works with faculty developing and loading content, repeatedly answers a variety of questions and manages to maintain a professional and affable demeanor. Timothy's technical skills and innate inquisitiveness have resulted in more media-rich courses than we ever could have managed

without him. Each has contributed extraordinary talent, patience and creativity to everything that has gone well.

The unsung heroes in all of our efforts in distance education have been the faculty who have signed on to contribute to this effort. It is pretty difficult for those with an advanced degree to admit that they need help doing something. Faculty at BHCC were willing to listen, revamp their instruction and try new things — things that they had never tried before. Enrollments in distance education courses regularly exceed 1,000 students each semester, testimony to the efforts of those doing the teaching.

Statewide, plans are being developed for creating a community college Internet portal, a site that students anywhere could visit and register and get information about distance education at all fifteen colleges.

Internet courses aimed at achieving certification are also being planned and contractual services investigated. As a demonstration, BHCC has become a regional CISCO Academy, using web-based modules developed by CISCO as one component of hybrid instruction leading to network certification. BHCC faculty deliver the classroom component.

The interactivity and reach of the Internet also holds promise for international collaboration. Arthur Centanni, teaching a summer session course, traveled to Russia mid-semester without interruption in the class. At the same time, one of his students interacted with him while she was visiting China.

Educators from The Netherlands, United Kingdom and Uzbekistan have visited BHCC in the last few months to inquire about our best practices and partnering opportunities.

High schools, businesses and social service agencies can now access coursework from remote locations, use specific modules from Web courses to augment instruction or have inline instruction developed and delivered according to their specific needs.

Anytime, Any Place, Any How — Even Now

Time and place have become fundamental obstacles for many in accessing and furthering their education, especially those who appreciate the value of lifelong learning. Without diminishing the importance of traditional impediments to learning, time and place have become the new 'learning disabilities.' Conditions of employment and familial responsibilities often compete with opportunities to upgrade skills, learn new subjects or prepare for a change in career.

Some occupations, such as law enforcement and health care, often require shift changes and mandatory overtime that can disrupt a traditional learning experience or preclude it from being considered at all.

The American Society for Training and Development estimates that 500,000 people each year will require retraining due to changes in the workforce, and today's graduates can expect to change careers eight times.

Technology sector companies are creating their own courses and requiring proprietary certifications that employees must hold in order to do their jobs. One example involves our MassCODE connection to UMass/Lowell. They have an agreement with Gillette to provide instruction in plastics engineering. Prior to MassCODE, adult students, working in Boston, would travel to Lowell two nights each week for classroom instruction. Understandably, Gillette enrollments never exceeded six students each semester. Once our connection to Lowell made the courses available at BHCC, enrollments increased to 15 to 20 students per course.

Students, in turn, are seeking customized training that fits specific applications that will achieve the greatest economic reward in the shortest possible time. And, by the way, they want it now. The tightening time spiral (which technology helped create) continues to get tighter.

Most faculty and students have "done" education one way all of their lives and have difficulty talking back to television, using the Internet to access coursework and, essentially, placing some electronic device between teacher and learner. That is a legitimate concern. But the interactive components of technology, when maximized in the instructional process, can seriously mitigate that feeling of detachment and isolation. Some have argued that in a traditional, university survey course conducted in a 400-seat lecture hall, for the student at the back of the room, is certainly learning at a distance. The anonymity of taking a course online is also liberating for some. Students often divulge things about themselves or their lives they would not be comfortable talking about in person.

With emerging streaming media capabilities, real time or archived video introductions are possible, lab assignments demonstrated, video clips included and secure testing administered. As an example, this past Spring, Tufts University web-casted their commencement exercises, and parents in foreign countries could watch sons and daughters receive degrees over the Internet.

As Arthur Levine, President of Teachers College at Columbia University, maintains, traditional classroom education provides students with a set of similar experiences and we, as educators, achieve various results. Some students do well while others do not. We need, instead, to offer students a variety of experiences and ways to learn to eventually achieve a more uniform set of results — results where we maximize student success.

BHCC has always prided itself on being a student-centered institution. Distance education over the Internet, through two-way television or correspondence classes, invites the student to assume more control over the process and engage in a true student-centered experience. The student is empowered. The student decides when, where, and sometimes, how the instruction is to take place.

Taking one course in a traditional classroom, a single parent could easily expend more than five hours each day and incur childcare and transportation costs in order to take that class. These factors make the prospect of returning to school daunting, at best. The same student, working an hour and a half each day from home, can achieve the same result through distance education.

As a society, we need to encourage every intellectual resource to develop to its full potential, regardless of impediments, obligations or life situation. As independent learners, students take a greater role in their education, develop better critical analysis skills, conduct research more critically and efficiently and can elicit more from their instructors, improving the experience for everyone. Roger Richards, an educator at BHCC for seventeen years, often mused about how overlooked the student had become in the educational process. Roger firmly believed that good students made good teachers better.

These opportunities present new challenges. The role of the teacher changes, the role of the student changes, collective bargaining agreements no longer fit and old competitors change into new partners.

I don't know whether it is in spite of or because of that fourth grade experience, but today — *Je parle un peu français. Merci pour votre attention.*

Education for Sociopolitical Participation

Stephen E. Slaner

Those of us who teach in community colleges are well aware that the prospect of a better job is a powerful motivator for student achievement. Traditionally, education has been the ladder of social mobility, especially for individuals from disadvantaged groups. It might be argued, however, that there is only so much room at the top, and that there is a lag between the experience of "the talented tenth," to use W.E.B. DuBois' expression, and the experience of the rest of the ethnic and/or economic group in question. What is missing in most discussions is the centrality of class, an understandable omission given that ours is probably the most individualistic culture on the planet. But how is the reality of class to be reconciled with the career-oriented aspirations of our students? While there is no easy answer to this question, this article will attempt to offer some tentative suggestions.

Transformation

One current buzzword in education is transformation. Since ours is a time of rapid technological change, we, as educators, must make sure that our pedagogy reflects the latest developments in computers and the Internet, to give just one example. Not to transform in an era when everything around us is changing is simply not an option. Much as Lewis Carroll prophesied, we must run very fast just to stay in the same place. But do computers offer a panacea for society's major structural problems? Will the Internet revolutionize the way our occupational choices are structured? Perhaps ultra-high-tech "whiz kids" can reinvent themselves minute by minute, but most students, even at Ivy League schools — to say nothing of community colleges — will not find their prospects dramatically improved by an injection or two of the latest technological fix.

Even if we cannot rely on a transformation of technology to save us, however, there is still a sense in which the term may be relevant to

community college education. In a recent collection edited by Jack Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation*, a number of educators attempt to work out a theoretical and practical justification for transformative learning. Most of the articles focus on the idea that each individual must confront the learning process in her or his own way, typically through a process of critical reflection and insight leading to some form of action. But then the question arises: what kind of action?

Here is where the notion of class comes back into play. If we grant that our society is highly stratified, and that the gap between rich and poor and between upper- and middle-income individuals is widening every day, then it follows that many of those who aspire to dramatically improve their economic lot — including many community college students — will be sadly disappointed. What can we as community college teachers offer them?

In an important article in the collection mentioned above, "Transformative Learning for the Common Good," Laurent A. Parks Daloz attempts to link transformative learning with the notion of social responsibility. Social responsibility is understood as a commitment to the common good, which in turn involves the idea of justice. Daloz singles out four conditions of the kind of transformation he is talking about (in Mezirow 112-117):

- the presence of the other (diversity),
- reflective discourse,
- a mentoring community,
- opportunities for committed action.

At Bunker Hill Community College, we embody the first condition (through our extensive international student population, for example) and often facilitate the second. In terms of reflective discourse, a wide range of views is expressed in my class discussions and those of many of my colleagues; the importance attached to critical thinking means that the students need to think through the implications of whatever views they hold. It is the third and fourth conditions that I want to address in the remainder of this article.

Community in the Classroom

As an activist with roots in the sixties, I still believe in the power of community — understood in a nationwide, even worldwide, sense. I must confess, however, that the slogan "think globally, act locally" makes a lot of sense. The folk singer Pete Seeger once told of a concert in Vietnam in which

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he sang antiwar songs from all over the world, including a ballad set near his home in upstate New York about the sloop *Clearwater*, which sailed up and down the Hudson River as part of an effort to promote cleaning up the water. To Seeger's surprise, his Vietnamese host informed him that it was only when he sang about his own local community that his commitment to more global causes could be seen as coming from the heart. Similarly, it could be argued that community must start where the students are before it can be extended to other areas.

As my colleague, Herb Gross, recently put it, "The commandment that says 'Love thy neighbor as thyself' is deadly if you do not love yourself. In this context, it is unreasonable for us to expect our most at-risk students to think about global types of communities when their own lives are in terrible disarray. Thus, I feel that the first step is to have the college in general and the classroom in particular serve as the students' community."[1]

Perhaps students — particularly those in the humanities, behavioral sciences, and social sciences — could be encouraged to view the classroom as a safe place within which their own experiences can be shared with others. When I taught a course in group dynamics, for example, I found that the students established a bond that allowed for the discussion of issues pertaining to personal development, family, and the work experience. There is no reason why a similar setting cannot be established in other courses.

Sociopolitical Commitment

The fourth condition discussed above has to do with opportunities for committed action. Referring to Nelson Mandela as a classical example of someone committed to the common good (and working against tremendous odds), Daloz notes that the African National Congress which Mandela later headed was a critical factor shaping his future development. The ANC offered an opportunity for Mandela to interact with other like-minded individuals and to test his ideas in the crucible of day-to-day struggle against apartheid. Other situations present themselves as well. In Daloz's words, "Such extended experiential learning opportunities as internships, Peace Corps and VISTA, or other similar work are powerful formative factors shaping a mature commitment to the common good" (117). This can also be found locally within BHCC's service learning opportunities.

I believe that a community college education can provide students with the resources necessary to examine their own lives and roles in society, which is

certainly a precondition for transformative learning. Particularly in the behavioral and social sciences (sociology, psychology, political science), segments or modules of particular courses can be focused on the connection between what is discussed in the classroom and the students' life outside the classroom. In my own introductory sociology class, for example, I ask the students to reflect on their own work experiences and how their jobs might be improved. The focus is, or is intended to be, on the power dynamics of the job and how the interpersonal dynamics at work reflect a larger social reality. I also ask students to name the particular subcultures with which they identify and to situate themselves in ethnic, religious, and/or class terms in American society or their society of origin. I also show the film *Bulworth* as a means of generating discussion about class and race in a non-threatening way. That is, because the film is nominally a comedy, and indeed has some very funny elements, students can relate to it initially as a form of entertainment. The class discussion, however, invariably gets into deeper issues. What would happen if a politician like *Bulworth* actually emerged? What about the way in which he portrays the African-American community? What is the film saying about the nature of our society?

Finally, in other settings I have experimented with Ursula LeGuin's magisterial science-fiction novel, *The Dispossessed*, which contrasts a communitarian utopia with a society very much like our own, as a means of getting students to imagine a society in which people relate to each other, not as adversaries or competitors, but as one extended family.

Internships

Besides in-class discussions, the possibility of establishing credit-bearing internships for those students who want to participate in social change organizations (such as Boston Mobilization for Survival, American Friends Service Committee, Greenpeace or the NAACP) should be considered. These opportunities are not presently integrated into the BHCC learning environment. I believe, however, that they would effectively complement the existing pathways for social advancement by enabling students to see the larger context in which their own efforts are situated. Besides being worthwhile in and of themselves, work opportunities with social change organizations enable the student to bring something quite valuable into his or her courses: a kind of "real-world" knowledge that most students have implicitly but not theoretically or formally. If education is, at least in part,

about imposing meaning and structure on reality (or, more precisely, reflecting on the kinds of meanings and structures that can or should be imposed), then the kind of internship I have in mind can be used to formalize the sort of tacit understanding of the real world that most community college students already have by providing a conceptual framework that itself is grounded in actual experience.

Conclusion

At a time when being a "compassionate conservative" effectively translates into being compassionate toward the rich and practicing "tough love" toward the rest of us, it is important to be clear as to what is meant by offering people more and better access. Or, to put it another way, access to what? The antiwar and social justice movements of the sixties opened up the social conversation to include the idea of a new kind of society grounded in human needs rather than war or economic exploitation. The almost total absence of such a discussion these days means that most of our students cannot see any alternative to the present situation. The singular advantage of education for sociopolitical participation is that it would give students the kind of broad perspective they need to raise their own questions and, hopefully, come up with tentative answers that go beyond the parameters of "the new millennium."

Endnote

[1] Herb Gross, personal communication (via e-mail), June 2001.

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Contributors

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Cynthia A. Bioteau is Dean of the Division of Developmental Learning and Academic Support at BHCC, a division that was recently awarded the 2001 Outstanding Developmental Program for two and four-year colleges in New England by the Learning Assistance Association of New England. Her energies and passion focus upon providing life-long learning opportunities for all community members with a special emphasis on nontraditional populations. It is this desire that has been the heart of her doctoral work at Lesley University.

R. Brent Bonah, founding Dean of Continuing Education at BHCC, is currently a professor in the English Department. He is interested in the role that visual perception plays in relation to the written word and actively encourages intercultural understanding in his classes by drawing upon students' experiences, whether they be from greater Boston or from many countries around the world. In addition, Professor Bonah has traveled extensively in Latin American countries, and was the recipient of a Fulbright Grant to attend a summer seminar in Brazil.

For **Shirley Cassarà**, twenty-eight years of teaching in behavioral science has been a vehicle for engaging in ongoing participant research in the dynmaics of teaching and learning. She is passionate about using her learning to inspire good teaching practice. She holds an Ed.D. from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in educational policy and research administration and specializes in human development and learning styles. Inspiration and support come from her husband, children and colleagues, and she recharges her batteries with all things musical, nautical and horticultural!

Arthur M. Centanni is a professor in and Department Chair of the Criminal Justice Department. He was a probation officer for 26 years and is currently a consultant for the Department of Youth Services, Massachusetts Office of Community Correction, and various sheriffs' departments. Professor Centanni believes that communities heal offenders. His most prodigious achievement is that of husband and father.

Sandra Clyne has taught on the adjunct faculty of BHCC for three years. She earned her Psy.D. from the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology in June, 1999 and her M.A. in applied linguistics from the University of Massachusetts in Boston in June, 2001. She is particularly interested in cognition, creativity and second language acquisition.

Cynthia Duda is in her eleventh year teaching writing part time at BHCC. Her poetry has appeared in *The Atlanta Review, The Anthology of New England Writers, The Comstock Review,* and *Ghosts in the Classroom,* among others. She has been a finalist in competitions sponsored by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, International Training Systems, SUNY-Farmingdale and *New Millenium Writings.*

Herbert I. Gross has had over 45 years of teaching experience in diverse settings ranging from Central Prison's death row in Raleigh, North Carolina to MIT's Center for Advanced Engineering Study, where he produced the critically acclaimed video course, "Calculus Revisited." He has a long list of achievements in the area of community college education in general and mathematics education in particular.

Pelonomi Khumoetsile-Taylor, Director of Diversity and Inclusion at BHCC, holds a Bachelor's in government from Wesleyan University and a Juris Doctor from the University of California Boalt Hall School of Law. She has devoted her career to public service and has been the recipient of numerous academic and professional awards. Ms. Khumoetsile-Taylor is currently completing her Ph.D. at the Brandeis University Heller School for the Advanced Study of Social Welfare.

David R. Massey, Director of the ESL and Electronics Technology program at BHCC, has a Ph.D. in cultural geography and a master's degree in international affairs. He served in the Peace Corps in Lesotho and was a Fulbright Scholar in Botswana. Over the past twenty years, Dr. Massey has taught geography, woodworking, and civil engineering. His articles have appeared in *Antipode, The Southern African Labour Bulletin* and *Ufahamu.*

Timothy M. McLaughlin thinks he has learned a few things about the craft of teaching writing since showing up on BHCC's doorstep as a rookie writing instructor in 1976. He also says he's going to keep at it until he gets it right. Tim has chaired the English Department since 1985 and is the long-time director of the BHCC Jazz Ensemble. When he is not tending to his other duties, he's trying to scrunch in some practice time on the saxophone.

Melanie Nguyen completed the ESL program at BHCC last summer, and is currently taking a full load of liberal arts courses in addition to her part-time job in the college library. She was born in Saigon, Vietnam and finished high school there. She came to this country in 1993, and moved to Boston three years ago. Melanie enjoys writing stories in her native language as well as in English, going to movies and listening to music.

Charles A. Shairs attended North Shore Community College and graduated from Salem State College with a degree in psychology. He has done graduate work at Salem State College and New England School of Law. February of 2002 will mark his 28th year at BHCC. He resides in Reading with his wife and three children.

Stephen E. Slaner has been an adjunct instructor in behavioral science at BHCC since 1992. He is also a senior lecturer in political science at University College, Northeastern University. He earned an M.Phil. in political science from Columbia University and an M.Ed. in student counseling from Northeastern. Mr. Slaner is currently an Ed.D. candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

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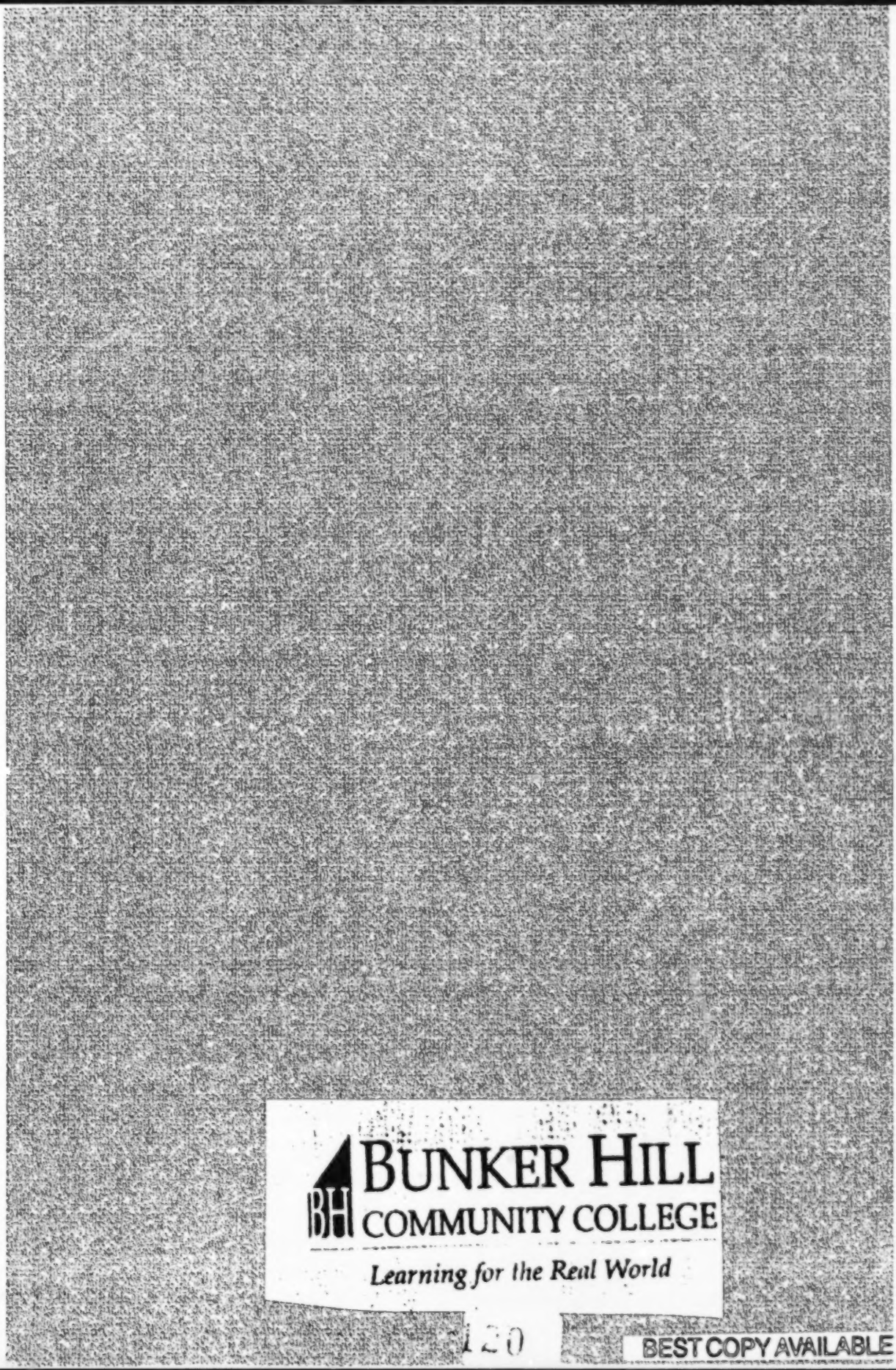

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